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JOANNA PACULA
ON "VIRUS"

KATIE HOLMES ON
"DISTURBING BEHAVIOR"

Sarah Michelle Gellar
as Buffy, giving the
horror genre a
twist—plus more

SHANNON TWEED
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Volume 7 Number 8





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It finally happened: Jerry Huxz and yours truly stopped just armed security guards, night watchmen, hounds and the mine field in our preplanned escape to Los Angeles. Not a wicketon, mind you, we were sporting property for "the big snow" (don't fight, we're transplanting the FF office to L.A.). We were slated to unite with friends, during a 3-day period, from whom we've been geographically separated, soon, we'll all be neighbors. Special thanks to actress/writer Vivian Schilling and video mogul Eric Persson for literally turning our first evening into a carnival (Jerry that I was a bit hysterical on the scenic ride, that spinning, zero-gravity, centrifuge thing, okay, the Ferris wheel). Enjoyed our traditional visit to Stuart Gordon's office. Stuart, director of *Darkness* and *Deadly Giggles* is a PE-AT-AT-AT-AT DOLLAR-BILL ICE CREAM SUIT—the year's "real good" movie. Go figure! He's making a guest comeback with *DOWN-LOADER*; we peered at the production design of the sci-fi/film metaphoric "Tyrone faze," a virtual—um—any further leaks are prohibited. For now. We also sincerely appreciate the hospitality accorded by Tami McDune, Jacqueline Lovell, Kevin Tenney, the *Blimming!* comedy team of Dave & Dave (aka Left & Right—also, fellows, 1962's *NUTTY PROFESSOR* is not a Lewis & Martin film), etc. We also reintroduced with FF staffers An Bess, Craig Pettit and his lovely wife Selma, and the exquiste Laura Schiff, whom we met at Bershire (Julia Gotthard) after I bartered down 4 hosted wares of Shaka (which means rise, to the customers where I thought I'd be) and *And At Truck*. If any physical reminiscences were uncanny—you have my humblest apologies. It was the rain with Salina's.

Back to work. Angie Everhart is prepping for a photo shoot... We're all jubilant that actress/writer Amelie Kinkadee—sometimes sweet, sometimes tart—is returning to the FF bullpen. And Binkie Stevens, the cover woman of *FF #1*, is composing more behind-the-scenes chronicles. And...getta grip—*FF* may be selected more often than their mouths!

End-Of-Chapter



Figure 4



Page 14



Page 24



Page 32



Page 44

4 KATIE HOLMES' "DISTURBING BEHAVIOR"

The star of *DAWSON'S CREEK* elaborates on her role—as a sexy purist—in the summer's sci-fi shocker. (Article by Frederick C. Smith)

8 "BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER"

She's about a new generation of "teen-targeted horror": angel, lascivious babes, safe sex & the "teen-idol" influence. / Article by Thomas Cushman

12 "BUFFY" BABE: JULIETTE LANDAU

She's embroiled in an alliance described as 'the Sid & Nancy of the winners set.' Landau discusses decedent Drusilla. / Article by Mitch Parsons

14 "BUFFY" BARE: BIANCA LAWSON

Cast as a Caribbean vampire slayer, Bully's rival in 16-year-old **SAVED BY THE BELL** alumna delivers kicks & quips / Article by Mitch Persons

16 "BUFFY" BABE: CHARISMA CARPENTER

What makes "Gordelia Chase" tick? Carpenter analyzes her TV heroine's "itch appeal," vulnerability and the fan mail. / Article by MICH PERSONS

19 "BUFFY" BABE: ALYSON HANNIGAN

Baby pictures, brain babies, mothballs, an alien mother & vampire
Hannigan is —and isn't—"Willow Rosenberg" / Article by Mitch Parsons

22 "BUFFY" BABE: MUSETTA VANDER

Formerly cast as a warrior queen and whip-wielding spitfire, the so-called bad girl is now playing a prissy matriarch. / Article by Mitch Pearson

24 JOANNA PACULA: VAMP VS. THE "VIRUS"

Co-starring with Jamie Lee Curtis, the Polish femme fatale drops glamour to perform as an alien-busting Soviet. / Article by Chuck Wagner

28 ARABELLA FIELD: GOOZILLA'S GAL

Last year, she eluded a volcano. This summer, Ms. Field survived something tall and equally temperamental. / Article by Chuck Wagner

32 WHISPERS FROM A SHALLOW GRAVE

Independent filmmakers recreate a slain starlet's life, and David Lynch focuses on the murder of a legendary ingenue. / Article by Anissa

42 ROBERTA COLLINS: DRIVE-IN DIVA

Her legacy: DEATH RACE 2000, CAGED HEAT, etc. She recalls bustin' out of the slammer with Penn Jillette, et al. / Article by Fred C. Sizer

48 SHANNON TWEEED: WITHOUT A NET

Welcome to Tweed's most candid interview to date: reflections on acting, A-movie sex, B-movie sex and sex & violence / Article by *Avi Glass*

56 LYDIA CORNELL: PAM ANDERSON OF THE 80s

The ex-silicon sex kisser/quirky bonobosell, party in a JAWS rip-off, has made a QUANTUM LEAP as a screenwriter / Article by Zoe Alexander

5 FATALE ATTRACTIONS

62 LETTERS

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KATIE HOLMES

THE "DAWSON'S CREEK" STAR ON HER ROLE AS A PUNKSTER IN SCI-FI SAGA.

BY FREDERICK C. SZEBIN

Raised in a Catholic, middle American environment, Katie Holmes acclimated herself to Hollywood's fast lane. Earning plum roles in decidedly non-provincial entertainment, the 19-year-old actress was cast as Joey, one of the denizens of a sexually stressed milieu known as *DAWSON'S CREEK*. The series has drawn the ire of parents and civic organizations (naturally, this will translate into a Nielsen winner for the WB network, whose only other bona fide hit is *BUFFY, THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*).

Last year, Holmes made her film debut in *THE ICE STORM*, an allegory about the post-'60s sexual revolution colliding with yuppie-dom. She nailed the role with her first audition. A few months ago, Holmes co-starred with Molly Ringwald (\$6.9) in *KILLING MRS. TINGLE*, another black comedy written by Kevin Williamson (8.7), the prolific screenwriter—whose track record includes *SCREAM 1 & 2* and *I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*—is also the creator/executive producer of *DAWSON'S CREEK*. *TINGLE* is Williamson's maiden effort as a director.

I can personally vouch, without fear of contradiction, that Williamson has absolutely nothing to do with *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR*, another horror film with a

panache for dropping dark jokes. Holmes plays the emotionally disenfranchised Rachel Wagner, a town rebel who takes pot and has pierced her navel. She discovers that the community's teens have been surgically detached from their free will. The mad Dr. Caldwell has programmed the adolescents for over-achievement. Think of "Anon Spelling Meets *THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE*." Naturally, chaos ensues. Human guinea pigs, who are implanted with the behavior chip, turn homicidal.

"Rachel is a girl at school whom everyone is afraid of," relates Holmes. "She's experienced" at a young age and puts on this tough act. As a result, she's very intimidating, but, deep down, she's just like everyone else deep down. Rachel is a little wild, she comes from the trailer park and just doesn't have a lot of money. Her chances of getting out of the small

Cast in a sci-fi shocker, Holmes exhibits *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR*: "It's cool to play a strong woman. I'm kind of innocent but my character is 'experienced'."



Holmes as Joey Potter, *DAWSON'S CREEK*'s "precoocious teen-bug." Series creator Kevin Williamson (*SCREAM*) cast the actress in *KILLING MRS. TINGLE*, a horror pic that will mark his directing debut.

town are pretty slim, so she realizes that she has to do well in school in order to get a scholarship. That's her little secret."

In deference to Mr. Williamson, she notes, "There are so many horror scripts going around Hollywood these days with the success of *SCREAM* and *SCREAM 2*. *DISTURBING BEHAVIOR* isn't a slasher movie, it's more of a thriller. It's an interesting take on how the authority is tweaking the brains of these kids to make them seem so perfect. I really liked Rachel because she's kind of a dark character, and this movie is really different from anything that I've ever played."

Exhaling a frosty breath on the film's rustic, Vancouver location, Holmes shifts the conversation back to Rachel: "She's definitely a magic character, kind of rough. When I arrived, I worked with the wardrobe, hair and makeup departments to come up with her look. She wears a lot of torn-up jenna, small shirts, a belly button ring, nose ring, weedy hair, lots of makeup, lots of lips. But it's just all part of the mask since we're trying to present her as being this guarded character who won't let anybody in. In the movie, we

continued on page 81

ATTRACTIONS F A T A L E



A couple of swingin': Carrie Fisher & Mark Hamill in RETURN OF THE JEDI. Fisher denies she's participating as screenwriter, in George Lucas' STAR WARS projects

Despite previously published rumors to the contrary, actress/camerawoman Carrie Fisher enlightened me that she is not working on a rewrite of George Lucas' script, STAR WARS EPISODE I. Best known for her role as Princess Leia in the original STAR WARS trilogy, Fisher is currently one of the highest paid script doctors in Hollywood. She did not, however, take her red pen to Lucas' latest saga. "As his friend, I read it, but I did not sit andinker with it," she says. "I wouldn't say I did, because he's not [scripting to] the [Writers' Guild] they'd come after me." In a recent interview with *FF*, Fisher discussed her STAR WARS character, her relationships with Lucas and Steven Spielberg, and the difficulties of being an ambitious career woman in male-dominated Tinseltown. Look for my cover story on this intelligent and talented woman in an upcoming *FF*.

Congratulations to director (producer Kevin Tenney) (WITCHBOARD, NIGHT OF THE DEMONS), who was recently nominated by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films. The recipient of the Academy's coveted Golden Scroll Award, Tenney was revered for his sci-fi thriller, THE SECOND ARRIVAL, starring Patrick Muldoon and Jane Sibbett, the film spins on the premise of alien conspiring to colonize Earth. Sibbett, best known for her recurrent role as David Schmeisser's lesbian ex-wife on FRIENDS, plays a news reporter who unravels the extraterrestrial subterfuge. I caught a screening of the film at the University of Southern California. Sibbett performed admirably, Mark David Perry's flawed script notwithstanding the story is punctuated with more holes than a golf course. Case in point: when Muldoon is chased by homicidal aliens at a bus station, Sibbett pulls up in her car conveniently on cue for rescue. When he quines, "How did you find me?" Sibbett replies, "I'm a reporter." As if that explains everything. Hell, if reporters were really omniscient, I'd be taking in a fortune playing the ponies right now. Shot in Canada, the film is marred by the same lack of hi-tech technology that plagued Tenney's NIGHT OF THE DEMONS 3. Many of the digitally enhanced images seemed downright cheesy. But, bottom line, I wasn't bored. Parts of it were suspenseful enough to remind me of THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR. My advice to Tenney: if the Almighty had intended for us to make movies in Canada, he wouldn't have put so many insecure people in Hollywood.

Last month, OtherWorld Entertainment teamed up with one of the comic book industry's most popular Goth icons, The Crow and Razzor, in a series of 45 trading cards. The franchise kick-off with renderings painted by James O'Bar and Everett Harniss, respective creators of the aforementioned protagonists (likewise, by Vincent Evans, Uglyboy and Eric Powell are in the wings). Remaining for \$1.95 per pack, the trading cards do in with the syndicated TV series, THE CROW STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN. According to Harniss, producer Bryce Zabel (MORTAL KOMBAT, ANNIHILATION, DARK SKIES) had

previously written a television treatment for his femme fatale. "[Producer] Jeff Most approached Bryce and showed him the Razzor comic. Bryce really got into the character and he cooked up this treatment. Jeff was also trying to put together THE CROW package at that time, so once THE CROW was green-lighted for 22 episodes by PolyGram, it all just fell into place. The way it's set up, the character of Razzor will debut on the show somewhere between episodes six and eight. They're aiming for a Xena/Hercules thing here."

My inside sources tell me that Zabel's vision for the series is "not as dark" as the previous two CROW movies, consequently, the subdued vision is prompting anxiety among personnel who are speculating how fans will react. CROW HEAVEN, scheduled to premiere in September, will star Mark Dacascos (BOOMER BOY, THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU). As we go to press, the Razzor role has not yet been cast.

SWAMPATHRATES is gearing-up for a six-week shoot in St. Thomas (Virgin Islands). The sweat-soaked, about blood-frenzy buccanniers, stars Kristy Swanson (S&P). It's the beautiful blonde's second encounter with blood parasite remem-

ber, Swanson played BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER on the big screen (1992). Blinks Stevens (11), a veteran vamp, describes her role as "lots of the vampire wives of Blackboard the Pirate. Mostly, of course, as the virtuous heroine." Fixing Swanson Tom Savini is directing the saga, he'll also play Blackboard!

More vamping: producer/director Kevin Summerfield (GAME OF PLEASURE) is gripping CARMILLA, an adaptation of Sheridan Le Fanu's classic vignette about a femme fatale with an insatiable appetite for the red stuff. "We're not doing a 'bidding head' movie," insists Summerfield. "Though based on a literary source, it's not an island Merchant film with people sitting in pater chairs sipping tea. It's more like a hybrid of THE RED SHOW DIARIES and THE HOWLING." Upon wrapping the film, Summerfield will shoot PHASMODIOMIA with Shae Marks (www.shae-marks.com).

Got a transatlantic phone call: it seems that actress/FF spokesperson Tiffany Shepis made serious waves at Cannes: connection in the corner and a frantic plea to shoot with the SOUTH PARK creators. Check-out the whole story next issue.

Universal Studios and Imagine Entertainment are keeping a lid on Gus Van Sant's remake of PSYCHO, Alfred Hitchcock's classic, which is scheduled to debut on Halloween. A Universal publicist curtly informed me, "We're not discussing anything to do with the movie, other than its release date." This defensive tract is probably a reaction to the negative buzz in Hollywood. Canine purists are incensed that Van Sant (GOOD WILL HUNTING) is reportedly shooting the same (Joseph Stefano) script that launched the 1960 classic: outrage was further fueled by (false) rumors that Van Sant, begging comparison to the original, was concededly shooting the remake on black & white stock. The big beef: "Why mess with a good thing?" The '68 release, of course, starred Anthony Perkins as Norman Bates, Janet Leigh as the liquidated Marion Crane, John Gavin as her betrothed and Vera Miles as her sister. A spokesperson at the Warner Bros. Agency, who rep Van Sant, tells me that the remake is "still in development," and not yet been cast. Nevertheless, evidence word has it that Anne Heche and Julianne Moore will

PSYCHObabble: Anne Heche (L) & Julianne Moore (R) have been cast in the remake's comedy CROW.



play the Crane sisters. Vince Vaughn (THE LOST WORLD) has reportedly been cast as schizoid Mr. Miles Bates. Van Sant declined to be interviewed for this story.

● Speaking of Hitchcock remakes: last July, Universal and Warner Bros. debuted their DIAL M FOR MURDER chestnut—returbished for the '90s—titled A PERFECT MURDER. Gwyneth Paltrow inherited the role portrayed by Grace Kelly in Hitch's 1954 thriller *Rebecca* to 1954. Kelly played a young wife whose husband (Ray Milland) hires an assassin to kill her. Hubby's plans go awry when wifey kills the killer. Perpetuating Hollywood's disturbingly trendy encouragement of May-December romances, Michael Douglas (54) was cast as 25-year-old Paltrow's murderous husband. As we go to press, Warner Bros. has no official comment on the remake—a fact that cannot possibly bode well for their confidence in the film.

● Jennifer Love Hewitt will not be cast as a werewolf in MGM's BLOOD AND CHOCOLATE, according to a studio spokesperson. Based on the 1997 book by Annette Curtis Klaus, the story involves a female werewolf who falls in love with a human, thereby inspiring her lupine family. Hewitt read for this part in April, but, says MGM publicist Danielle Rosefield, "Jennifer has not been cast and the project is not on our production schedule for 1999." Hewitt is currently shooting I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, a sequel to last summer's sleeper. This time, Hewitt's character is menaced by the hook-wielding fisherman



Gwyneth Paltrow and Michael Douglas in last spring's PERFECT MURDER. Not unlike Douglas' FATAL ATTRACTION, both stars returned on the set (they) to shoot an optional fade-out, text audience "don't like" the original ending.

while on an island vacation. Scheduled to debut on Thanksgiving, the studio shot a teaser trailer that was legged to their spring & summer video commerce.

● According to Steve Brewster, president of the Bette Scouts of America, his organization is headed as "one of the largest fan clubs in the world" by no less than Linda Ward, officer of (what else?) the National Association For Fan Clubs. Currently weighing in with almost a thousand active members, the Scouts pay homage to Bette Page, the '50s pin-up/applaud icon whom I interviewed for FF's first double issue (3/3/77). Five dollars buys you a laminated membership card; among the perks is a hefty newsletter, chronicling all the latest news, interviews & merchandise. Check! Money orders should be made payable to Steve Brewster, Bette Scouts of America, 2641 South 53rd, Kansas City, KS 66106.

● Athena Massey (4-7 & 5/3) wrapped up her role on BLACK SCORPION, the Roger Corman series produced for Showtime. She plays the tempestuous Hurricane, a former marine biologist who, after becoming engrossed in toxic waste, returns as a pollution-fighting superhero. "Hurricane possesses oceanic bonds—supernatural

powers over tides, wind and water," explains the actress. "The only trouble is, she goes about fighting pollution using illegal means, such as stealing money from banks to fight dirty politicians." BLACK SCORPION is expected to debut in either fall '98 or spring '99. Meanwhile, Massey is pushing ahead with Athena, a comic book that she's developing with Brooke Wachtel. She recently pitched the project to Hanna Comics. Will the company bite? We'll keep you posted.

● Coming your way this summer: Hanna Comics' Vampirella teams up with Crusade Studios' Str. This is a major event in the comic book world because it is marks the first crossover integration into a monthly series story arc, rather than a stand-alone, one-shot or "imaginary" story. The resultant union is documented in Queen's Gambit, a saga accessible in Vampirella issues 7-9 (i.e. June through August). The creative team includes the considerable writing talents of Grant Morrison & Mark Miller, with the penning of Amanda Connor and inking of Jimmy Palmiotti. Says Hanna's Retail Promotions rep Seth Biederman: "The crux of Queen's Gambit rests upon the fate of a single child. In their previous battle against the Black Pope in

Vampirella: Holy War, Vampirella and her seddick Duke acquire the mysterious Black Testament, an 'anti-Bible' written by Jesus Iscariot. This Black Testament reveals that vampires from Vamp's home planet of Diskulon are planning a wide-scale invasion of Earth. To make this invasion possible, the vampires need to use one particular child. Vampirella and Duke must find this child before the vampires do, or else this vampire apocalypse will happen and all is doomed. She is drawn into the story by Petros Esposito, an employee of Str's and the grandmother of the child." Queen's Gambit is also endorsing a classic Warren villainess, the Blood Red Queen, as well as "an Old-War Kenobi-type of character known as the White Bishop." The character of Str was originally created by Billy Tucci.

● Caught up with Julie Strain (3/2), fresh from a night of partying with Hugh Hefner at the Playboy Mansion. The B-movie diva was celebrating her starring role as "Judge Julie Strain" on Playboy TV's SEX COURT. "We just finished filming the pilot and the first two episodes," says Strain. "It's real sexual situations and real judgments and real spunkiness. Lots of fun, lots of laughs, lots of nudity. You just wait and see—it's absolutely going to take off like a rocket and become the number one show on Playboy!" SEX COURT will be broadcast every other Wednesday in August.

The inexpressible Ms. S. reports that she also recently shot STRAIN SISTERS' SLIMBER PARTY SHOCKUMENTARY starring Strain siblings Julie, Kristi, Kimber and Luzzy, the movie was shot in one day. "The project is going to be huge," enthuses Strain. "This is the only time that four Strain sisters are seen in a movie together. It's a documentary that contains a snail movie made for the time watching the documentary within. It is beyond brilliant. We have Kevin Eastman [Heavy Metal publisher/Graffiti's husband] as the pink phone caller and our maid, Mary Lou, as the butcher knife-wielding killer. There's lots of screaming and shower scenes. There's nudity involved, except for the 16-year-old, Luzzy. We don't want to get in any trouble, but Luzzy was sold by Hugh Hefner that the minute she's eighteen, she will be a Playmate if that's what she wishes."

Strain also appeared in a supportive role in THE INDEPENDENT, which stars Janeane Garofalo and Jerry Stiller. This time around, the brunette bombshell plays Miss Kenyon who's described as "The Angel of Mercy." Broadcasting an AK-47, Julie is pretty much bustin' out of a

continued on page 60

Hooked on sequel: Jennifer L. Hewitt serves I STILL KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER on Turkey Day.





A sultry Alleana Messey was encouraged to play the title role in **BLACK SCORPION**. Though she slipped on the costume (inset), Messey opted to convincingly perform as action heroine, Hani-Come: "She sheds to fight dirty pebbleheads."



Buffy, Vampire Slayer

TEEN-TARGETED HORROR, A NEW GENERATION:
ANGST, LUSCIOUS BABES AND SAFE SEX.

BY THOMAS DOHERTY



SCREAM and SCREAM 2, I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, and TV's flavor of the moment BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER (dormant since the late '80s—around the time the Freddy Krueger and Jason sequels entered double digits and terminal silliness—teen-targeted horror is back, not with a vengeance but a wisecrack. The wry response of the smart aleck in SCREAM 2, who identifies his favorite scary movie as SHOWGIRLS, typifies the hipper-than-horror attitude of the films and their audience. The new teen-targeted horror film traffics in playful irony and speeds along with the certainty that today's adolescent—reared on cable television and nurtured on endless hours of videotape rentals—has enough background in the horror genre to compose a doctoral thesis



Left: Buffy rebuts Spike (James Marsters); adolescents exploring their demonic supernatural & carnal

on *The Metaphysics of Screen Terror: Parodic Post-Modern Pastiche in the Fin de Siècle Teenpic*.

Wes Craven's surprise 1997 blockbuster SCREAM kicked off the new sensibility cycle by exploiting the genre-wise ways of sub-Gen-Xers. (Craven should know: from LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT [1972] to his recent

"Buffy and the gang must know that the vampires they slay represent the classic adolescent problem, a sexual awakening that is at once quite thrilling and very scary."



Sarah M. Gellar & her ensemble (l-r): Charisma Carpenter ("Cordelia Chase"), Anthony Stewart Head ("Xander Harris"), Nicholas Brendon (poster), "Xander Harris", Alyson Hannigan ("Willow Rosenberg") and David Boreanaz ("Angel").

Scream-fests, this auteur of adolescent psychosis has been responsible for most of the post-graduate education. Figuring that any semi-alert teenager knew by heart the kill-by-numbers exercise that defined the "body-count" films, Craven and screenwriter Kevin Williamson decided to drop an insistence on suspension

of disbelief and invite audiences along for the ride. Why try to outsmart the kids, when you can attract them by sharing the secrets of the trade? Screen horror has always operated on the two levels—even on a soundtrack, the scream of terror seamlessly blends into the pool of laughter—but the new cycle meshes the two tracks with a

fresh, double-dealing self-reflexivity. Not just the director, or the audience, but the kids in the films see themselves as characters in the teen horror movie.

Though the sardonic intelligence of the Craven-Williamson fashion line is surely more welcome than the dreary depredations of the digital sequels, the irony is liable to strike some horror purists as too clever by half. On the plus side, the films are smart, quick-witted, and basically good-spirited, for all the nubile teens stabbed and garroted. On the down side, few of them strive for true moments of horror. At its best, Craven's NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET series lived up to its title with queasy interludes of nightmarish terror—not so much in the stainless steel claws of Freddy Krueger, but in the disorienting jump-cuts between dreams and reality, where school buses and home rooms (pretty scary places to begin with) melted into Salvador Dalí landscapes. Nothing in any of the current cycle of teen horror films approaches that hallucinatory terror, nor is any moment as unnerving as, say, the scene in WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE when the outcast girl searches for a friendly face to sit by in the school cafeteria.

Perhaps the shockiest exemplar of the new teenage horror cycle (not to mention the flagship subversion of the fledgling Warner Brothers network) is BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER, inspired by the well-remembered 1992 movie. Unlike the films, the television show must adhere to a different kind of serial structure: not killing in sequence but unspeeling in episodes. Where the teenage cheque on the big

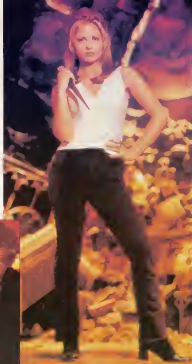
screen depletes one by one as a dance macabre of musical chairs, the teenage ensemble of BUFFY survives from week to week to exorcise demons into computer-generated dust. The versatile Sarah Michelle Gellar plays the high-kicking Buffy Summers, this generation's designated vampire slayer and luscious babe. Her partners in neeromancy are quirky best friend Willow Rosenberg (Alyson Hannigan), wisecracking second tier male Xander Harris (Nicholas Brendon), ansey beauty queen Cordelia (Charisma Carpenter), and certified hunk Angel (David Boreanaz). The interpersonal dynamics play out the patented John Hughes love triangle

Gellar and Mark Metcalf (THE STUDENT), cast as Buffy's adversary, The Master, during the series' 1st season.



wherein female A (Buffy) is the object of the unrequited passions of male B (Xander), who is the object of the unrequited passions of female B (Willow).

Lecturing on vampire lore and retreating in errant hormones is the Watcher, Rupert Giles (Anthony Stewart Head), Buffy's mentor and subliminal sexual soulmate. As a nurturing ensemble that singly and together acts as a weekly hook for fandom, Buffy and the gang can expect to enjoy a long life expectancy, at least until one of the supporting players sinks too low in Q-scores or gets too greedy in contract negotiations. To appreciate better the difference between the film and television variants of teen-pic horror, imagine how



that it reclaim the creatures for lighthearted, immature fun.

Second, and less obviously, AIDS sucked the sex out of Hollywood's teen-targeted films. Once a beachball of toga parties and peeka-boe shower scenes, the teenpic became positively chaste in the age of the sex plague. Track the difference between two very similar but crucially different films, *RECKY BUSINESS* (1983) and *HOME ALONE* (1990). One is about a deserted adolescent turning his house into a brothel and learning the ways of Rebecca De Mornay; the other is about a deserted preteen turning his house into a booby trap and learning to hit burglars over the head. From Tom Cruise to Macaulay Culkin, sexual initiation to boyish high jinks.

Like *WAYNE'S WORLD* and *CLUELESS*, *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* is a safe-sex zone for high school kids, especially girls. After all, teenagers and vampires are both about sex and feeding, two activities that, in tandem, have special resonance for the adolescent female. (As no less a vampire authority than Bela Lugosi told Ed Wood, females respond more viscerally to horror, it's in the blood.) The gender bending innovation on the theme is that the main character is not the vampire, but the vampire



Kristy Swanson (B) was cast as Buffy in the '92 film. Gellar (D) inherited the role in the TV series. L: ex David Bornstein as Angel. R: Snikking out Luke (Brian Thompson) in "The Harvest" episode

the show would exchange its core demographic if, one Tuesday night, Willow were strung up Drew Barrymore-style in the front yard.

IF *THE X-FILES* struck gold by catering to the paranoid style in American culture, *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* draws its lifeblood from a force more fearsome than alien abductions, namely the AIDS

virus. The horror of AIDS had two motion picture consequences. First, and most obvious, was the sudden proliferation of vampire films in the late '80s and early 1990s. By the time of *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* (1992) and *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE* (1994), blood parasites had gone seriously adult and upscale. One of the delights of *BUFFY* is



killer, and not, as in most vampire legends, an adult male but a teenage female with a bimbo moniker. Of course, dual satisfactions abound: tough, smart, and take-charge, Buffy also presides, albeit in short skirts and tight tank tops. As she juggles through her aerobics regimen (in the high school library?), the Watcher is the only male around not watching.

Buffy and the gang are all good kids quite happy to take their pop quizzes in a deeply traditional high school environment. The crosses they wear are both utilitarian (they do ward off the bloodsuckers) and markers of their conservatism (they could be parochial school kids from the 1950s). They spend most of their time in the high school library with the safe, big brotherly but still "cute fuddy dud," Giles. Not only are they riding the world of vampire predators but they're keeping up with their homework, informing their parents about late nights out, and being respectful to their elders. Teen rebellion in the 1990s is about staying in line.

Week in and week out, the value system barks back to a time of crewcuts and beehives. Thus, the recently deflowered Buffy learns the harsh lesson of the teenage girl too trusting of the teenage boy with only one thing on his little mind. No sooner does her romantic Angel have his way with her than he turns into a leathesome cad (or in his case, reverts to type as a bloodsucking villain). After a night of illicit passion, Buffy awakens to find her once-sollicitous beau decidedly disrespectful of her the next morning. Mom was right about him.

Of course, the signature hook of the series is the power it bestows on teenage girls, placing them at the center of the narrative as active agents who kick the butts of loutish, overconfident, and gross

HEAR THEM ROAR

"The signature hook of the series is the power it bestows upon teenage girls, placing them at the center of the narrative as active agents who kick the butts of loutish males."



Li' Slayer as Buffy, a good kid in a deeply traditional environment. ("You can attack me, you can send assassins after me, that's fine. But nobody messes with my boyfriend.") **B:** W/ Alyson Hannigan (Willow Rosenberg), who debuted in *MY STEPMOTHER IS AN ALIEN* (199). **R:** W/ series creator Joss Whedon



males. The appeal of this and the other motifs is too schematic to need much elaboration: the adolescent outsiders who are really the ultimate insiders, the pretty, popular girl who is nice to everyone and her less socially confident friend who has a great personality; sweet teenage boys who are female-directed, and what every teenage girl wants: a handsome, polite, protective, older guy with a neat British accent.

Having more in common with the drive-in Saturday fare of Roger Corman and American International Pictures in the 1950s than with the gross and grim product line of the heckey-masked monsters of the 1980s, the current crop of horror campus bespeaks the calm temper and good humor of the latest teenage generation. Perhaps in the late 1990s, adolescent life is fraught with enough potential terror to make a realistic depiction of same seem redundant as escapist entertain-



ment. But even if the really unpleasant stuff is kept at a safe distance, the snappy comebacks and sophisticated guise can't laugh away the demon behind even the jauntiest horror teenpic. Buffy and the gang must know that the vampires they slay represent the classic adolescent problem, a sexually awakening that is at once quite thrilling and very scary. □

Buffy Baibes

JULIET LANDAU DISCUSSES THE GENESIS & LOVE LIFE OF HER DECADENT "DRUSILLA."

BY MITCH PERSONS



Juliet Landau, as Drusilla, is a tender lover with ex-lover Angel (David Boreanaz). "He tortured my character before turning her into a vampire. She's scary!"

It's not easy to compete with an articulate, latex dinosaur who's sidekick is Whoopi Goldberg, but Juliet Landau effortlessly stole the limelight in *THEODORE REX M* (1996). Granted, the \$33 million cheesy comedy circumvented theatrical release and did a pratfall directly into video bins. But tolerant viewers were rewarded with Landau as Dr. Shade, whose impersonation of a humanitarian is right on the money. Bedecked in an Anna Sage-red dress, she cheerfully projects a mean streak of viciousness. If she had lacked the cuddly dinosaur's butt, you'd look the other way. Or cheer her on.

Eccentric roles seem to be a specialty for the daughter of Oscar-winning actor Martin Landau. "I have been involved in some rather interesting characterizations. When I did *ED WOOD* for Tim Burton, I played Loretta King. She was the actress who played *THE BRIDE OF THE MONSTER*, one of Wood's films. I had to wear this long wedding dress-type gown yet, at the same time, give the impression that I was about to become one of the walking dead!"

Landau hybridized Dr. Shade's manner and Loretta



Drusilla/Spikes. "Sweet, offbeat love."

King's "living/dead" schizophrenia into Drusilla, the waif-like vampire that she plays on *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*. Abetted by "love-partner" Spike (James Marsters), the duo make life a living hell for occupants located in the deceptively placid town of Sunnydale.

"The roles of Loretta King and Dr. Shade were a big



Landau and Jensen Ackles ("Spike"). "The Sid and Nancy of the vampire set!"

factor in my being cast as Drusilla," explains Landau. "Joss Whedon, the executive producer of *BUFFY*, had seen my work and asked for a reel to be sent over. Then I went in for a meeting, and I met with Joss and Gail Berman and David Greenwalt, the co-executive producers. We had this really incredibly creative, wonder-

ful meeting where ideas were being bounced back and forth. I had read a little bit about Drusilla beforehand, and already had an idea about how I would like to play her."

The meeting concluded with the birth of one of the TV medium's most vile femmes. "I must give Joss credit for that," insists Lan-

JULIET LANDAU

"[Executive producer] Joss Whedon had the characters of Spike and Drusilla in his mind for over a decade. Drusilla is very deep: there's lots of dimension to her, a lot of levels and color."

don. "He had a very specific vision about the show, and apparently had the characters of Spike and Drusilla in his mind for over a decade. Drusilla is a very deep character, and there's a lot of dimension to her—a lot of levels, a lot of color—which is really fun for me to play. In terms of her being so frightening, I have come from the inside of Drusilla. So to me, she's not scary. Whenever you play a character, you sort of pick up the character with tender hands and you love that character."

"But then there is that back story about Angel, (David Boreanaz), who is Buffy's vampire boyfriend. Angel was also a former lover of Drusilla's. He did a complete turnaround and wound up torturing her before turning her into a vampire. That unspeakable experience left the poor girl mentally unhinged. There's always an element that's unpredictable about how Drusilla is going to react to anything. She's nothing like a clear-cut, straightforward woman, and I think that's the part that makes her so frightening. So when I watch myself on the show, I go 'Oh, my God, she is pretty scary!'"

"Even though Drusilla can act so grotesquely, I just love playing her. I'm glad I'm now a semi-regular on the show, because it gives me the time and the opportunity to explore different facets of her character."

Joss has described Spike and Drusilla as the Sid and Nancy of the vampire set (*longhairs*). I really like that analogy. Even their look is a cross between period, Victorian-looking and Kate Moss-cheap. But there's also a sweet, sentimental side to their relationship. That's

one of the things that makes them interesting villains. It sort of induces out the evil, horrible deeds that they do. There are moments when Drusilla goes on these bad trips, and Spike saves her from rambling on about daisies dying, or her hair falling out or whatever.

"Their love can get a little off-beat, too. It really showed up in the episode where Drusilla regains her vampire strength by draining it out of Angel. There was this dynamic with Angel, Spike and Drusilla where things got just slightly kinky. Here was Angel tied to a pole, his hand pierced by a stake, and Drusilla's hungrily lapping up his blood while Spike looks on. It was perhaps the most powerful and frightening scene that I was involved in. Yet, at the same time, and in its own bizarre way, it showed the closeness that these three vampires have." □

ED WOOD homage to the *Zelig*-style of *THE MONSTER*. Landau & George Skouras as actor Tim Johnson.



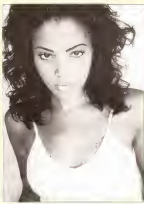
Buffy Babes

CAST AS BUFFY'S RIVAL, A CARIBBEAN VAMPIRE SLAYER,
18-YEAR-OLD BIANCA LAWSON DELIVERS KICKS & QUIPS.

BY MITCH PERSONS

She's a cheerleader ("I think I speak for everybody here when I say, 'Huh?'"). She's a vampire exterminator ("We saved the world. I say we have to party."). Buffy Summers, embodied by Sarah Michelle Gellar, has not only survived an entire season of blood parasites, but pulled a fledgling network into the mainstream. Sure, profits have insured the series' renewal, but do viewers believe Buffy's mortality will ever be imperiled? Of course not; the show's longevity leans on Buffy's occasional allies and adversaries whose personalities, not to mention fates, are more flexible. And for more risky sample a two-parter titled "What's My Line?": Buffy was matched with comely Kendra, who dethroned the cheerleader as Queen of Karate. A rival vampire slayer, Kendra, even outshines Buffy with quips—all delivered in a disarmingly seductive Caribbean accent.

But, reflecting on her fierce fateful role, 18-year-old Bianca Lawson articulates an accent. "I was born and raised in L.A.," smiles Lawson. "It's a funny thing, because Kendra's accent was such an issue. When I went in to read for the part, I did it in my own voice, and then they called me and asked, 'Can you come in tomorrow with an accent?' I go, 'What?' "And so I didn't really know what they wanted, and then they decided they wanted Kendra to be a well-educated Jamaican because the thing about it is, the upper class has a very



Lawson: from *SAVED BY THE BELL* to *BUFFY*'s Jamaican belle

British base to it. But because there are other people on the show with British accents—James Marsters, Juliet Landau, and Anthony Stewart Head—they wanted me to do the patois, some people decided it was too heavy and sometimes it couldn't be understood. It was like constantly trying to make it not as heavy—so maybe we could cheat a little bit and have to change some of the words. Actually, I would have liked to have the accent

heavier, and there was a little bit of a conflict there. But they were the ones in charge, so I gave them what they wanted."

But the youthful Lawson has acclimated herself to dissenting situations: "I was a regular in *SAVED BY THE BELL*: THE NEW CLASS [1993-96] when I was 14." And she survived the entire '94 season of Dustin Diamond's "Screetch" (the most annoying sitcom nerd in history). "It was my first all-consuming job. Everybody on the show was about the same age, and everybody was hitting that teenage thing at the same time—dealing with things that come with being a teenager, and then knowing that you are a celebrity at such a young age. Then, when you have a whole bunch of kids, it's like you deal with the ups and downs."

"I was really intense at school, and it wasn't a situation where the show helped me do my schoolwork...and my school really didn't want me to work, so it was kind of an ongoing battle. During that time period, I wasn't incredibly happy but that wasn't totally to do with the show. It was more or less the conflict between school and the show, both demanded my full attention all the time."

Lawson felt no such disharmony in her off-screen rapport with Ms. Gellar. "Sarah is a true professional. I really admire her. She invests so much of herself in *BUFFY* and if she feels she has to extend herself for quality, she will do it. I don't know if that was a good thing or a bad thing for her, but I



Slay Girls, Gaila (left) & Lawson (right). Right: Lawson reprises her role as a vampire exterminator in "Becoming," the first episode of the show's second season. This time around, Kendra is Gaila's ally.

thought it was pretty commendable.

"Sarah also happens to be a genuinely nice person. She always treated me as if I was royalty. Here she was involved with this really busy asked role—she had just completed two movies, *I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*, and *SCREAM 2*—and then she had the series. That much work might turn anyone else into a raving lunatic, but not Sarah."

Lately, Lawson has "done some episodic TV since *BUFFY*. I did the

film *PRIMARY COLORS* with John Travolta. Now I'm involved in a theatrical production. That's the thing about this business: you can be really busy for a big chunk of time, like I was now, and then all of a sudden you're just kind of floating. And then, maybe a week later, you'll be really busy again. It's frustrating at times, but it's kind of nice to have things just a little bit unpredictable."

It's a philosophy that *BUFFY* should preserve in bronze. □



Buffy Babes

WHAT MAKES "CORDELIA CHASE" TICK? CHARISMA CARPENTER ANALYZES HER CHARACTER'S BITCH APPEAL

BY MITCH PERSONS

"I'm new to this acting thing," says long and lovely Charisma Carpenter. "My first series role was in *BAYWATCH*, then *MALIBU SHORES* and now *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*. Before that, I worked in my dad's San Diego restaurant as a waitress, did property management and clerked at a video store. I never really intended to be an actress, after doing those bread-and-butter jobs, I went back to school to study teaching. Through the guidance of a commercial agent, I found out who the top teachers in California were and I decided to audit the classes.

"I had some interviews with some schools, and I finally chose Playhouse West as the one I wanted to audit. It is an acting school, and after a while I really got the bug. I took the whole thing very seriously and rehearsed all the time. I read 1500 pages a week, did book reports, just totally did the curriculum. Then I got a theatrical agent and things started snowballing, eventually ending up with my playing the character of Cordelia Chase in *BUFFY*.

"I have kind of an ironic story to tell. I had seen the movie, *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, and thought



Prior to *BUFFY*, Carpenter was a waitress, a video store clerk, and played "Ashley Green" on *MALIBU SHORES*, a soap produced by Spelling Entertainment.

to myself, 'Wouldn't it be great if I could somehow get involved in that?' At the time, the thought of being an actress was the furthest thing from my mind. I had always been just an observer of the entertainment industry, nothing more than that. Suddenly, I became part of it! I found myself at publicity gatherings with actors whom I had admired or marveled at. And they knew who I was! They knew I was the girl who played Cordelia!"

The aptly-named Charisma ostracizes any pretense of her TV character's personality. Though the egocentric Cordelia spits verbal acid at Buffy and the heroine's conspirators, Carpenter has developed a tolerance for her alter ego. "When I first started playing this girl," says the Las Vegas-born actress, "I thought she was just one of those witty people who we all run into now and then. She had all these snappy one-liners. She once mentioned that she didn't like certain things. 'Not because they were expensive but because they cost too much.' I thought that was a pretty droll remark. Then I realized that was typical of some of the airheaded, sometimes callous things Cordelia comes up with. But I don't think she's dumb. She's manipulative, and you have to



The ladies of **BUFFY**: Carpenter dishes with Sarah Michelle Gellar (l) and Alyson Hannigan (r). "The cast are my heroes," says Carpenter. "There's a scene in the first season's 'Prophecy Girl' episode, between Alyson and Sarah, that just tore my heart out."

have certain smarts to make people do what you want them to. I mean, Cordelia's popular but she's popular on purpose. And she's misunderstood. She obviously has a bad relationship with her mom. She is always reaffirming her importance, either with her looks, her wardrobe or her words. Some of Cordelia's bravado and nastiness is used to cover up what I see as her vulnerability....

"That vulnerability really came through in an episode called 'Invisible Girl,' where Cordelia admitted to actually being very lonely at times. She became a little more sympathetic in that show but not a whole lot, since she reverted back into the old, snobby Cordelia in the last scene.

"To tell the truth, I sort of like Cordelia being a snob. There is a bit of a tendency in our second season to make her a little more human but, if she changed too much, I think it would spoil things. She does have some of the funnest lines. They serve a double purpose. They show her to be not nearly as witty as she thinks she is, and they relieve the tension that sometimes builds up, what with fighting vampires and all. Without Cordelia's singers, there would only be Nicky Brendon's one-liners to rely on. Not that Nicky does not do a beautiful job as Xander Harris. His frustration over Buffy's rejection of him, and his ongoing verbal battles with Cordelia are, I think, a real highlight of the show.

"I really admire Nicky's acting. He's so good, so damn good. Just recently I was watching a rerun of the episode where Xander asks Buffy to go to the prom with him, and she turns him down. That was such a great scene. Nicky never ceases to amaze me. You have to make every effort not to let your head swim when you're talking to him, because he darts things off so quickly that it's hard to keep up. It seems that he's all these different things rolled in one. He can come across so really

CHARISMA CARPENTER

"Cordelia is manipulative but misunderstood. She obviously had a bad relationship with her mom. She's always reaffirming her importance with her looks, her wardrobe or her words."



Adhering to the genre's inherent idealism, Gellar and Carpenter are served up to "Buffy Bury" R. Carpenter & the BUFFY ensemble, flanked by Anthony S. Head (X), Rupert Graves & Nicholas Brendon (Dorothy Nevins), who's been miffed in-studio "I don't like vampires. I'm going to take a stand & say they're not good."



exasperating sometimes, but then when you talk to him it's like you're talking to a little boy.

"Nicky, David [Boreanaz, who plays vampire Angel] and Ally [Hannigan] are my best friends on the show. Ally is an amazing person. She plays a mousy character, and she's not mousy or reserved at all—she's very congenial. And what an actress! In the last episode of the first season, 'Prophecy Girl,' Ally's character, Willow, saw Cordelia's boyfriend dead and the carnage in the

video room with three students being killed. The scene Ally had later-on with Sarah [Michelle Gellar], where Willow talks about dying and seeing death all over, really tore my heart out. I did this interview with America Online and they asked me what actors I would most want to work with. I told them there are always the so-called Great Actors but I also said, 'I'm just happy to be with the people that I'm working with now, because they're all so gifted. They're the

ones who are my heroes.' I'm proud to be associated with them, and I'm glad to see that they've become so popular with the public."

But popularity does have drawbacks; the fans can be as monstrous as anything on the show. "Every once in a while I get creepy fan mail. Almost psychotic," says Carpenter. "This one letter I got asked me for my picture, and wanted me to pose in several different ways and in different kinds of outfits. I won't mention what ways or what outfits, but it was pretty bizarre. Then there are the ones who ask me to send them an adult videotape. That is definitely not the kind of stuff I like to read, believe me. Lately, though, the bundles of mail I've gotten have been so supportive, so sweet—letters from the heart that say, 'I hope you get to do bigger things' or 'This is what I didn't like.'"

But Carpenter admits that, during the first season, she doubted BUFFY's darker psyche would prove marketable. "I was concerned that the public just wouldn't take to the series. Then, around mid-season, I had this dream. The producers and the cast—we were all in some hotel room, like in Cannes—and we were there promoting the show. There was a huge carnival-like festival on our account. There were clowns on stilts, scrubs on the floor and, in the distance, a police barricade controlling a mob who wanted to meet us. They wave, we wave back and the crowd goes nuts! They're chanting, 'We love Buffy! We love Buffy!'

"Now, Ally knew I was worried, so I told her about my dream. She said, 'It's an omen, a sign. That means people are going to go bananas over our show!'

"And we are enjoying a second season. Hopefully, we'll be having a third and a fourth. So in spite of my insecure feelings, my dream turned out to be 100% correct. People really did go bananas over BUFFY." □

Buffy Babes

**BABY PICTURES, BEANIE BABIES, MOTHBALLS, VAMPIRES:
ALYSON HANNIGAN IS, AND ISN'T, "WILLOW ROSENBERG."**

BY MITCH PERSONS

They don't call her **BUFFY** for nothing. Her exercise regime includes vampire exterminations (tough workout), practicing martial arts and purging her home turf of nuisances like an overgrown praying mantis and insurance salesmen. But sometimes she leans on modern technology to smoke out these critters, so Buffy inevitably bonds with a shy computer nerd.

"I knew it! Not in the sense that I had the slightest idea what was going on, but I knew there was something I didn't know."

Willow Rosenberg

Willow is portrayed by the very extroverted Alyson Hannigan, a lequacious youth with large, doe eyes and a mischievous, sexy smile. After a few minutes of conversation, it dawned on me that the only thing Hannigan shares with Willow is the same body.

"When we first started shooting **BUFFY**," recalls Hannigan, flushing her pearly whites, "I thought to myself, 'Yes, we are very, very different.' But then, as time went on, I was like, 'You know what? We're kind of similar.' Willow obviously



Alyson Hannigan is Willow, **BUFFY**'s best. The actress' first feature series was the short-lived **PRINCE OF STRAW** (1995). "It was sort of a **DEWITCHED**-kind of show."

has computer smarts beyond belief, and that aspect is more about her than me. But I think we're similar in a lot of ways...like we're both in our own little world, and sometimes people just don't really understand that. I don't think Willow is as weird as I am. Sometimes I can go off on tangents, where Willow never really does, but it's at the point now where the crew and the cast of **BUFFY** have gotten used to my quirkiness. So it's okay."

Hannigan's societal disposition—her resistance to conformity and inclination to perform—is rooted in her pretense. "I come from Washington, D.C., where both my parents were photographers. When I was a baby, whenever they needed an infant in a shot, they would use me. I really believe that my fondness for acting stemmed from those experiences because—even as a toddler—I loved being in front of a camera."

"When I was four years old, my mom and I moved to Atlanta, Georgia, and she would do magazine jobs, print jobs, stuff like that, most of the time using me as a model. A commercial agent there saw some of my pictures, signed me and got me some TV commercials. When I was about 11, I was

visiting my dad here in California one Christmas vacation. He took me around to some California agents and they said to me, 'Yeah, we would definitely sign you up if you lived here. I told my mom when I got back to Georgia, and she said, 'Okay, let's move!' And we did. I've been working ever since.

"My first picture was MY STEPMOTHER IS AN ALIEN, with Dan Aykroyd and Kim Basinger. After that, I did a short-lived sitcom called FREE SPIRIT [1989-90]. It was sort of a BEWITCHED-kind of show. It went for 13 episodes, then got cancelled. I did some guest spots here and there, nothing really too wonderful—movies of the week and all that stuff. But nothing great until BUFFY.

"I almost didn't get the part of Willow. My agent had submitted me, but, for some reason, they wouldn't

ALYSON HANNIGAN

"I almost didn't get the part of Willow. They had cast someone else but then she got fired. I was at a 7-Eleven store one day when I got a page to call the producers..."



7. The actress recently wrapped DEAD MAN ON CAMPUS ("Roommate Wanted" for a limited time only). 8. The Slayer Group: Hannigan w/ Sarah M. Gellar ("Buffy") & Nicholas Brendon ("Xander") L. WB's Xander, Willow's heartthrob



see me. They had cast someone else for the presentation, but then she got fired when the show was picked up. I finally was able to get an audition for the recast... and I auditioned for what seemed like forever. Then I waited and waited, but didn't hear anything. I'm not the most patient person. After a while, I was at the point of, 'Oh please, just tell

me yes or no, because I will kill myself if I don't find out!' I figured, even if it was bad news, at least I would know. Well, I was at a 7-Eleven store one day when I got a page to call the producers. After all that auditioning and waiting, they told me I had gotten the part! I was like, 'Ahhh right, cool!'

"On the first day of shooting, I was a little bit nervous. Nick [Brendon], Charisma [Carpenter], and Sarah [Michelle Gellar] had all known each other from the pilot episode, and I was pretty much a stranger. But it didn't take very long for all of them to become very good friends of mine. I mean, everyone involved with the show is so great and so nice. I really consider them my family. I see Nick and Sarah all the time. During the first season's hiatus, I had my tonsils taken out, and Sarah visited me in the hospital and brought me a little Beanie Baby. That was so sweet of her—and so typical.

"Then there's Charisma. She is so funny! Cast as Cordelia Chase, she always seems to get the show's best lines. During the first season, she was always insulting my character and now, in our second season, she seems to be directing her venom at Xander. It's so weird because Cordelia is such a bitch and Charisma, in real life, is just the opposite. She is an extremely nice person.

"Anthony Steward Head, who plays Giles, is another nice person. I really love him, he's just the sweetest man. He's smart and so wonderful, and has a heart of gold. But he has a deep, dark secret. He puts mothballs in his clothing—!

"During the first couple of episodes last season, I was getting these headaches. I couldn't figure out why. But these headaches were getting really painful. And so this one time, we were sitting in the library doing a scene and I was sitting in a chair. Tony's cost





Locker liaison between Hannigan and Charisma Carpenter ("Cornelia"). "Charisma is extremely nice—and so funny, she always seems to get the best lines."

was on that chair. I said, 'What is that horrible smell?' And Tony's like, 'Oh, there are mothballs in my pocket,' and he goes into this explanation about how he is a Method actor and that this smell brings the character to him. He had 12 mothballs in his pockets and I said, 'What, are you crazy?' So he says, 'Yes, I guess it is a bit much.' So he narrowed it down to two mothballs and my headaches went away.

"There was another scene with Tony, where he'd was supposed to have been fighting or something and had been dragged across the floor, so he went outside and rolled around in the dirt to get the 'dirty character feel.' He came back in

and I—oblivious to what he had been doing—said, 'Oh Tony, you have some dirt on you,' and I was wiping it off and he goes, 'No, no, no! I was just rolling around in the dirt for 15 minutes, trying to get this filthy.' That's Method acting—I just don't understand it."

Willow: Xander, wanna stay and help me?

Xander: Are you kidding?

Willow: No, it was a joke I made up.

Hannigan attributes the credibility of the show's characters, and their relationships, to executive producer, Joss Whedon: "He's always there for us. There have been times when one of us has said, 'I really sucked

in that last scene. I just couldn't get with it,' and Joss has dropped whatever he's been doing to offer his support and steer us in the right direction. I honestly don't know what I would do if he weren't around. He could have such an attitude—and that would be okay—but he's really smart. He could be such a jerk, but he's not."

"I have never respected anyone more than Joss. He's just brilliant. I would love to get inside his brain for an hour and look around. He has ideas after ideas after ideas. And his ideas are so great. It's true that we have a terrific set of writers on the show, but there's a Joss Whedon touch

behind every plot twist, and behind every occult force that Buffy and the gang face."

"Willow's belief in these supernatural forces was one of the most difficult things for me to get used to. I subscribe to the 'Prove it, and I'll believe it' theory. I'm not going to say, 'No, vampires don't exist' because, if they do, I wouldn't want to offend them. But who am I to say what exists and what doesn't? I think I really would like to take somebody's word for it, like if they had pictures or something. I don't think, though, that I would need a demonstration of a vampire—especially right in front of me. □

Buffy Babes

FORMERLY A WARRIOR QUEEN & WHIP-WIELDING SPITFIRE, THIS SCI-FI SIREN BUFFED-UP TO PLAY A PRAYING MANTIS!

BY MITCH PERSONS

For crying out loud! Tap into the Net, or sit-in at any random sci-fi expo, and BUFFY addicts are already talking about their preferred "classic" episodes! C'mon, people, the show has wrapped only its second season. "Coolest" episodes, maybe—but classic? Anyway, I polled a coterie of L.A. "Buffs" and they concurred: a mutual favorite is the first season's "Teacher's Pet" episode, the one about a smitten Xander Harris (Nicholas Brendon) who's mesmerized by Natalie French, a substitute science teacher. But Harris' libido loses its steam when he realizes that, behind her human facade, Ms. French is a big bug—specifically, a praying mantis who literally hangers for student bodies.

The curvy critter was played by Musetta Vander, a raven-haired, liquid-limbed actress with dark, penetrating eyes and a deliciously wicked grin. It was not her first ignoble role: Vander was previously cast as a snickering warrior queen in *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION* and as a vinyl-clad, whip-brandishing sadist (aptly named "Lash") in *Full Moon's OBLIVION* and *OBLIVION 2*. But her career as not entirely a rogue's gallery. She portrayed an ambitious reporter in *UNDER THE HULA MOON* and as a total good-guy psychic in the TV series, *SUPERFORCE*.

In most of her films, Vander comes across as 100% corn-husker American. This may not seem like much of a distinction if it were not for the fact that, in private conversation, she has a charming Afrikaner accent.



Musetta Vander, supporting *Clave Lame* (1991), is GUILTY: Vander is co-starring w/ Soloma Hayek, Will Smith and Robert Conrad in *THE WILD, WILD WEST*

"I was born in Durban, South Africa," admits Vander. "As a matter of fact, I lived there most of my life and got degrees in psychology and communications. For a short time, I worked as an interpreter translating my native language, Afrikaans, into English. That's probably how I became somewhat acquainted with the American idiom. It's interesting because when I play a part, I don't purposely focus on trying to do an American accent. It seems to happen automatically. In *UN-*

DER THE HULA MOON, I do an American accent throughout. I didn't specifically try to play the woman that way, I just wanted to do the character. It so happened that she emerged as an American, which was just fine."

HULA MOON was written and directed by Vander's husband, Jeff Celentano. "If it hadn't been for Jeff," she says, "I never would have come to the United States. When I met him, I was dancing on a South African TV show called *TELEMUSIC*, which is very much like our MTV here. My first and only love, up until that time, was the dance. My mother was a ballet teacher, so I became a teacher as well. I taught ballet, and also managed to do some professional dancing in some stage shows and television. Jeff was already a director of some renown. He whacked me off my feet and popped me over here to Los Angeles, where I've been acting professionally since 1990. I still take a dancing job from time to time, or I'll go to a dance class, but my main concentration is acting."

And—what'd I tell you?—she has resisted being pigeonholed as the bitch. Not that there's anything wrong with it. "I've played sympathetic parts, and I've played villains. I must confess, though, that playing the bad guy is a lot more fun. As a villain, you can be a little more over the top than if you're playing, let's say, a housewife. If I play a housewife, I can't exactly go crazy and do crazy things—like I did playing a fantasy character in *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION*. You can take things to an extreme that you can't if you're playing somebody who's more normal. But don't get me wrong. It's a huge acting challenge to play somebody who's

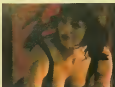


↑ Vander in **HORTAL KOMBAT: ANIMELATION** & As **BUFFY**'s substitute teacher, she seduces "Teacher's Pet" Xander and (bottom) peels into her mantle mode

down-to-earth and real, and sometimes it's almost a little bit harder to play a normal person."

But the femme fatale that she portrayed in "Teacher's Pet" was hardly normal. She was a praying mantis for crying out loud. "But it was a fun part, and it was fun coming up with a character that was believable. I went about playing her by thinking that, in life, everything kind of blends together. I think elements of everything exist in a person. It was just a matter of drawing up maybe a certain quality—an animalistic or predatory character—and putting that kind of slant on it. I tried to imagine what a praying mantis did, how a praying mantis would walk. I incorporated that in the human form a little bit, but I didn't make it obvious. I just put a little subtle thing in there."

She describes Nicholas Brendon as "a genuinely decent person. It's so im-



portant that the show's regulars stay grounded. And it wasn't just the members of the cast who were so terrific. *Everyone* involved with **BUFFY** contributed 100%; they all wanted the show to be as good as possible. I honestly believe that type of Judy Garland-Mickey Rooney 'let's put on a show' spirit is what makes **BUFFY** so successful."

Vander would love to reprise the role in a future episode. "If you remember, at the very end of 'Teacher's Pet,' the pupae that the creature has laid are beginning to hatch. I think it would be marvelous if Ms. French could come back, maybe as her own offspring or twin or something. Then she could go about tormenting Xander and Buffy and Willow all over again." Though not officially signed for a return engagement, Vander shrugs and grins. "A mantis can always happen!" □

JOANNA PACULA VIRUS

THE POLISH FEMME FATALE DROPS GLAMOUR
TO PLAY AN ALIEN-BUSTING SOVIET.

By CHUCK WAGNER



VIRUS Pacula survives the annihilation of an alien elite. "It was physically demanding, but I don't mind that. Bumps and bruises come with the territory."

A former *Vogue* model romanced by director Roman Polanski, she made her U.S. debut in '83 and has been indelibly linked to "femme fatale" roles. But, featured in John Bruno's **VIRUS**, Joanna Pacula cast herself adrift from the stereotype of a siren. "I play a Russian scientist on the Russian ship who survived," Pacula explained, her accent mellifluous to the ear. "I'm the only survivor of the prior ordeal until the Americans get there... and then I don't survive the movie!"

Does she play a Ripley-type of role: a strong woman popping alien predators?

"You know what?" she laughed. "This is an action film, so we all have guns."

With a script by Dennis Feldman (**SPECIES**), Jonathan Henaleigh (**ARMAGEDDON**) and Chuck Pfluger (**DARKMAN**), **VIRUS** unites Jamie Lee Curtis, William Baldwin and Den-

ald Sutherland as tugboat passengers who take refuge from a storm in a supposedly abandoned Soviet outpost. It turns out that the crew was murdered by a brood of aliens who have genetically gauged human primates as an expendable virus. The sci-fi film is produced by Gale Anne Hurd (**ALIENS**, **DANTE'S PEAK**) in addition to Mike Richardson and Todd Meyer, both of whom produced **BARB WIRE** and the **TIMECOP** television series. John Bruno, who has served as visual effects supervisor on a few of Hurd's movies (e.g. **TERMINATOR 2**, **THE ABYSS**), debuts as director.

I asked Curtis if she was being professionally groomed as an action heroine. But, **TRUE LISS** and her current



project notwithstanding, she emphatically denied it. "No—not at all," replied Curtis. "What attracted me to *VIRUS* was that it is actually an exciting story. It's based on those comic books that they sent me. I'd never done anything like that—I've never been in a sci-fi movie in my life. And the money was good and the opportunity, timewise, was good for me. That's why I did it. It was physically very challenging, and I worked real hard to make my part of it good. The sets are unbelievable. It all takes place on this big ship. It's far out. But I had no delusions of 'Sigourney Weaver-ness'—that's not my ticket."

Facula's performance has drawn rave notices from not only her director, but audi-

T. Facula in a showdown with Gaius, a robot created by TBS Tippett Studios ("They did an incredible job building that stuff"). B. Facula and the crew of the *Sea Star*, including Jamie Lee Curtis (at), examine the remains of a biomechanoid.





T. Most like Al, an alien-engineered entity that's sealed inside the animated corpse of the Sea Star's captain (makeup effect by Steve Johnson's FX). R. Billy Robert, Pacula, Cliff Curtis & Jamie Lee Curtis are trapped on the ship, facing the bio-mechanical constraints of their alien nemesis

ences attending test screenings. Nevertheless, she prefers to rave about her costar. "Jamie [Lee Curtis] is terrific," gushed Pacula. "She's a very friendly person to work with, and she has a lot of energy. She brings a lot of energy to the project. Working with her was a great experience."

Though the film's physical centerpieces were not unlike bootcamp training—immersions in water and food, dancing aimlessly in the gusts of an artificial hurricane—Pacula was a trooper.

"Strangely enough, it's not as bad as you think, because it's the real thing. I'd rather do the real stuff, and be blown down by a real wind than pretend that I'm being blown around. It was demanding, but I quite enjoy that. Bumps and bruises come with the territory."

But what about *VIRUS*? "You know what, I do that, too. Before *VIRUS*, I did a '40s-style movie in Spain [IN PRAISE OF OLDER WOMEN, shot in Barcelona]. It was all beautiful clothes and beautiful environment. Everyone of us needs a change, so I did one of those. And then I wanted to do an action film."

VIRUS is partially driven by CGI and some genuinely surreal effects—the latter generated by Steve Johnson—involving hybridized effering of human tissue, robotic guts and alien plasma (one insider described Johnson's "cyborgized" visuals as "awesome").

"It was actually very interesting, because some of them are computer-controlled machines with hydraulics," said Pacula. "I didn't know much about it—I still don't know much about it. I understood some, and it was unbelievable to watch and realize that such things could be built. We had a couple built which were totally full-size, seven-foot creatures. They did an incredible job building that stuff. They were capable of moving. And



it's always easier to act with objects that are real instead of imagined."

Compliant with the demands of a certain role, the Polish-born actress can promptly dispense with her accent. Sample her turn as Kate, the dance hall girl smitten with Val Kilmer's "Doc Holliday" in *TOMBSTONE* (in one scene, an indignant Doc reprimands her "Why, Kate—you're not wearing a bustle. How low!"). Pacula developed a drawl that made her sound like a native of the film's Old Tucson locations. Did she ever consider entirely dropping her native accent? "Not really," she smiled. "I don't believe losing my accent will be of any help. I love Westerns, but I don't think people will be hiring me to play girls from Tennessee."

"This is something I worked very hard on. In *VIRUS*, my accent was basically my own—a little on the Russian side perhaps, but not that much. I left Poland a long time ago, in the early '80s. This is sort of my second country. I missed the whole time [with the Solidarity uprising] because I was in school in the late '70s and, when I graduated, I left for France. So basically, this whole political movement happened there, but I sort of wasn't really that much aware of it. Poland had allowed travel for years, unlike Russia. Later on, the government changed, but I was still studying so there was no point in me going back. My parents are very happy in Poland. They have no interest in coming here. They live in the country and have a beautiful place, so they're very happy there."

"I studied acting in Poland—I started in Poland. Then I studied a little bit in New York."

"My first break was *GORKY PARK*. I played alongside William Hurt and Lee Marvin. William is very intellectual. I can get along with that kind of personality. He demands your attention. Because it was my first

JOANNA PACULA

"I play the only Soviet survivor of [an alien invasion]...but then I don't survive the movie. I am in three quarters of the film's running time. Jamie Lee Curtis is terrific, friendly, energetic."



A version of 3-disco movies—*TOMBSTONE*, *MY GIANT*, *GORKY PARK*, *WARRIOR*, *LOCK*, *THE ASSAULT*, *IT*—Pacula "would love to do another Western."

movie, I was so happy. Nothing could bother me at that time. I was very excited about doing that role and shooting in bizarre, snowy Finland. And we were all there together, freestyling. I think everyone kind of enjoyed that project. It was really different. It was like doing a Russian film. So that

was my big break and then I continued."

"After you get your first job, you think, 'Is this for real or not?' I really didn't know I wasn't even sure if I wanted to stay in this country. It was a bit of a confusing time for me. I didn't know if I had a shot at working in this country—

my English was really bad at that time. So I stayed cool and thought, 'Maybe this is it, maybe it's not.' So I took my time. I started working with European directors. I did a movie with English director Lewis Gilbert (*NOT QUITE PARADISE*, 1988). I did a few European films."

Another film, *THE KISS* (1988), has undeservedly slipped into anonymity. The perversely sensuous scenario is performed with panache by Pacula, who's cast as a parasitic "vamp"; she's rebuffed by her surrogate daughter (Meredith Salenger), who's coming of age, and the teenager's streetwise neighbor (Mimi Kuziy). It's one of the few horror movies that leans entirely on a female ensemble. "I was a host," smiled Pacula (the film's original title was *THE HOST*). "Basically, my character is not really alive any more but she carries a spirit—it's a genre film," she chuckled. "I had to transfer that spirit to the next generation which happened to be a young girl, my niece, who was played by Meredith."

She was rewarded for the two months that she invested in her other genre film, *VIRUS*. "I'm in three-quarters of the film," she quipped.

So what's next? "I don't know. I'm reading. I've been getting an interesting spectrum of characters. After an action movie, I did a little comedy with Billy Crystal called *MY GIANT*. It's a small part—I had a couple of scenes with Billy—but it's a good start for me to see if I can do comedy. I'm just testing the waters. In acting, the discovery never stops, it's what you can do and what you can't."

A Los Angeles resident for years now, Pacula is content her career. "I'm the kind of person who, when I get a script, I don't want to know too much about it. I just want to open the page and see what's in it. But I do have my preferences—I'd love to do another Western! I really love that period... and I like costume films." □

ARABELLA FIELD GODZILLA'S GAL

LAST YEAR, FIELD ELUDED A VOLCANO. THIS SUMMER, SHE SURVIVED SOMETHING TALL & EQUALLY TEMPERAMENTAL.

BY CHUCK WAGNER

Twentysomething, charming, lovely. Just about the least likely choice to serve as poster girl for the renewal of a genre known as "the disaster movie." But, in DANTE'S PEAK (1997), Arabella Field put some serious distance between herself and a raging volcano. Only a few months ago, she did the Mantan Moreland shuffle ("Feet, do your duty") to duck GODZILLA. But, at home, she's more concerned about her cats.

"I was born in Manhattan, then grew up in Brooklyn [poases]. I have to say that I'm really distraught because I just found out that my cats have feline HIV. Isn't that insane? I got the cats right before I started GODZILLA and, apparently, they were like AIDS babies. I just found out. I got them from this cat-rescuing lady. They got all their shots and, for the first eight months I've had them, they've been fine! It was weird, they started sneezing and coughing, and I brought them to the vet yesterday. He did all



Well, this is as good a caption as any to remind you that Field is one of SEINFELD's stars. That's right, she played "Miranda" on the series' scalded-More-Gottis episode

these tests and said they were probably born with it. There's a similarity to humans. If you're born with HIV, you're fine, but then you catch a cold or something, look out! There's three of them and the one is fine, but the other two are in the animal hospital so this one is freaking out. 'Where are my siblings!'"

But when not caring for

her cats, Field performs. She's a well-read thespian and Fordham graduate whose parents were not involved in film or New York theater. We chatted only a week before GODZILLA debuted, and Field deflected even the broadest of queries. For instance, does the scaly huggaboos stamp out Broadway? "I'm probably not supposed to say," she al-

lowed, recalling her non-disclosure agreement with the studio. "A Godzilla stride is a pretty long distance, so he makes his way all over the place."

And, strutting at a speed of 300-500 miles per hour, the Big G gets wherever he wants to pretty damn quickly. So what's it like to audition for a film where the leading "man" is tall, dark, ugly and extremely temperamental?

She laughed. "Somebody else asked me in an interview, and it's so ironic. The bigger the project—the more life-changing and huge the project is—the easier the audition process. It was the greatest thing I went and did the audition. They taped it, it went

great and I found out I got the job! They just had me do my scenes with people. I'm lucky. In the movie, I have more scenes with people than with CGI.

"It was funny I was working on another movie in Wilmington, Delaware—a Bruce Willis movie..."

It was the lamented production of BROADWAY BRAWLER, which had shut



"It was a disaster. Crazy. Bruce Willis fired the director and her key people. Then everybody was fired. But I made it back in time for my GODZILLA audition."

key people. One day I had a job, the next day it was over. I made it back just in time for GODZILLA. I left BRAWLER on my resume because I felt like it was a notch in my belt. I really survived this thing, you know? [cracking a golfclub laugh] It was insane! I don't think anybody's ever going to see any of the footage. Literally half the movie...I had, like, only a week left on the movie.

"The oddest thing was, up to then, it was one of the most pleasant experiences. Lee Grant was an amazing director. Everything looked great, she was on schedule. Nobody ever even told us. The actors weren't fired, we were just—well, nobody showed up! All the footage is tied-up in legal things...it's all fucked-up."

Cast in the remake of the 1954 Toho classic, Field plays the husband of cameraman Animal (Hank Azaria). Earlier this year, a cover of *The Los Angeles Times'* Calendar section previewed the film with a photo of Azaria under the heel of you-know-who.

"I remember the day we

did that setup," and Field. "I only have a couple of scenes face-to-face with Godzilla, and that was the day when Hank has a big thing with Godzilla."

So does Hank turn into toe jam?

"You gotta go see the movie," she trilled, maintaining the ever-thinner veil of secrecy.

I ask Field to elaborate on her face-off with The Big Guy. "It was funny, because it was my first day of shooting. They had started shooting ten days before or something, but my very first day was looking at Godzilla. It was this massive shot on location in New York with thousands of extras. It was insane. I was like, 'Oh my God!' There's so many elements involved in the shot. If I don't hit my mark, it's going to cost them a million dollars!"

Field didn't actually see Godzilla until the behemoth was optically manifested in post-production. But she's no stranger to being imperiled by absolutely nothing. "I was really happy because I did that volcano movie, DANTE'S PEAK. As a re-

Making her life debut in 1993, Field did her apprenticeship in the likes of MR. WONDERFUL, THE POMPADOUR OF LOVE, NAKED IN NEW YORK & THE WAKE

down due to reported friction between star Bruce Willis and director Lee Grant. So who was worse, Godzilla or Willis?

Field collapsed into a long bout of laughter. Though reluctant to breach the whole thing months earlier, when she started GODZILLA, Field incrementally leaked the backstage brouhaha. "I should probably not answer that question. I don't want to get myself into trouble. This is a new experience for me. All

these interviews! I gotta watch what I say."

"Okay, I was working on BROADWAY BRAWLER and it was a big disaster. We shot 20 days out of 50, and it was like one day we had a job and the next day we didn't."

Some suspect that Willis derailed the production. Insiders say that his ego—translated into Godzilla verbiage—is bigger than this building. "It was crazy," sighed Field. "He fired the director and he fired all her

Prior to GODZILLA's debut, the title character was manifested in lesser iterations—as only a sound effect or CGI-rendered limb. "You really use all your acting skills imagining this huge, scarily thing," explains Field.





"Every time Godzilla moved, he wrecked havoc; his foot knocks over cars and things fly through windows. That was cool to be there when stuff went off."

"In those old movies, Godzilla goes from being the bad guy to the savior of Tokyo. Wouldn't it be cool if, in these modern films, Godzilla did that for New York?"

right on it or it would blow the effect.

"This particular day, I kept practicing running on my mark because I thought, 'We can only do this once!' They were blowing up a building and knocking over that sign. They start rolling, and the sign—five stories tall, waving back and forth—is supposed to start to shaking because it's an earthquake. Then all of a sudden, the assistant director's like, 'Wait! wait! It's not shaking! It's not shaking! Hold the roll!' And we're all standing there. And then, like a minute later, 'Boom!' The sign falls over.

"And there was another day like that, where a building was supposed to collapse. The way it was supposed to work was they blow up part of it, and then the rest of the building collapses. But then, they blew it up too soon or something. There was always a lot of excitement... riding in Humvees and stuff."

Field's role in GODZILLA proved more substantive. Teaser trailers were shot and released as early as last summer, a TV spot, which

featured an off-screen Godzilla crashing New Year's festivities on Times Square, was broadcast on December 31, 1997. Production of the film was also bereft of subtlety.

"A lot of stuff in downtown Los Angeles was cool," grinned Field. "They considered us to be caught-up in our own stunts, because we were sort of near glass blowing and stuff."

Actress/stunt woman Patricia Tallman (BABYLON 5, 7-1) was hired to literally take the fall when a diner's window discharge from the impacted air rush of Godzilla's footfalls.

"It was like every time he moved, he's wrecking havoc!" enthused Field. "His foot knocks over cars and things fly through windows. That was cool to be there when stuff went off, what with cars jumping up and stuff. I mean, I come from the theatre but now I've done some movies. Nevertheless, it's still a new thing for me. It's interesting because it's so real!"

"Actually, my time on GODZILLA was so easy. Everybody else spent weeks and weeks in the rain, and I

out, I had a lot of practice staring at a production assistant, pretending he was the volcano and screaming 'Ooooh, my God!' I was a member of the science team. I survived. I was in the whole movie. It was a great experience. We worked on that movie six months, although you might not realize it when you see it because my character's not in it that much. But we are in the whole story. And it was great practice for GODZILLA.

"My God, in DANTE'S PEAK there was a ton of stuff. It was hilarious. I swear, working on these action pictures is like a whole new set of things. It's this incredible pressure—like if you don't hit your mark, you're going to cost the production a million dollars because they can only blow

up the building once! I never felt that kind of pressure.

"DANTE'S PEAK was a lot of really fun stuff. I'd never previously had any experience with special effects, so it was fascinating. Oh my God, there were constantly blowing things up. We shot on location in Idaho for a long time, and then we did the rest of the stuff in the MELROSE PLACE studio in Santa Clarita. But Idaho was incredible. They took this beautiful, old town and built it up, then destroyed it. This one day, we had this shot where we had an earthquake and everything started to fall over. This giant motel sign—you know, like the Mobil sign at gas stations—was supposed to rock and fall over. I had to run in to a mark, and it was a close up; hence, I had to be

"Everybody else spent weeks in the rain," says Field about co-players Matthew Broderick & Milla Jovovich (left). "I had lots of interior scenes." (R) Budget for GODZILLA was \$100 million. Milla Jovovich made a cameo as a tornado that "disrupted filming in Jersey City." Footage of the natural disaster may be in the final cut.



didn't have a lot of that. I had more scenes with people, I was lucky. I had a lot of interior scenes. In New York—which was the exterior of the diner scene shot in LA—we do come face-to-face with Godzilla."

Face-to-face?

"I'm looking pretty far up to see his face. Godzilla was later added in by CGI, so it's really hilarious. Someone has to show you where to look to see Godzilla. But it's good. You really use all your acting mettle and imagine this huge, horrible thing."

"On the human side, Frank Asaria's character and I work at this news office. He's this 'do anything for a story' video cameraman and I bossing him around. My best friend [Maria Piltillo] works at the news agency. I tell him not to go after Godzilla, but I tell her to go after her story. I'm really tough."

There has been some mention that GODZILLA could be the first of a film trilogy. Will Field's character be coming back?

"I hope so. I grew up watching all the Godzilla movies, and I was so psyched when I heard they were making this. I thought, 'I'll do anything to be in GODZILLA.' And I couldn't believe that I got it. They had a very short list of movie stars that they wanted, so it was a very big break for me. But anyway, in those old movies, Godzilla goes from being the bad guy to being the savior of Tokyo. Wouldn't that be cool if, in these movies, Godzilla did that for New York?"

Upon wrapping our interview, Ms. Field raced to the set of her current project, an indie titled *STICKY FINGERS*. Should be a comparative vacation for the actress. No overgrown lizards, absolutely no one is eaten. And no Bruce Willis. □

Squish! Roland Emmerich, who also helmed *ID4*, offers homage to Marv Newland's 2-minute cartoon, *DAME MEETS GODZILLA* (1968). "I've only a couple of scenes face-to-face with Godzilla," says Field.



THE LINDA SOBEK STORY

WHISPERS FROM A SHALLOW GRAVE

INDIE FILMMAKERS RECREATE
CHEERLEADER'S TRAGIC LIFE.

BY ARI BASS

L.A. was balmy. I drove past the second-run theater on Beverly Boulevard. The marquee read "JOEY LAWRENCE in CHASING AMY." Perfect.

I waited for her at Priscilla's in Burbank, a little nothing of a gourmet coffee shop. I arrived early, as always. Twenty minutes from Beverly Hills to Burbank must be some kind of record. A cup of the coffee of the day, two sugars. I fidget with my tape recorder. She pulled up in her black Ford Bronco, a 1988. She was right on time. We sat at a table on the sidewalk, far away from the godawful musak. Me and Truth Keck.





Trudi Kuck, as the late Linda Sobot, in *WIDES- PANTS FROM A SHALLOW GRAVE*. "Linda wanted to be an actress," retires Kuck. "She wasn't tall enough to be a fashion model so she found her niche in bikini modeling for car magazines and posters."



From Keck as Linda Seick. "So Trash, Family and Friends are more important than career," says Ted Newman, director/co-producer of *WISSPER/GRAVE*. "I heard the name and about Linda. Her bikini modeling may have seemed trivial, but it was a means to an end."

Back in November, 1990, she drove a white Toyota Tercel from Spokane, Washington to L.A. Keck had graduated college with a degree in Communications. Her fraternal twin sister, who graduated with an identical degree, had moved here a month earlier. "Growing up, I never saw Spokane as a small place, a place I wanted to get out of," she says. "That's not how I felt at all. It was a nice, family place."

Adapted by an older family, Keck and her sister were raised by a family whose roots were anchored in Spokane for generations. The family resided in a comfortable home until 1988, when Keck's father retired and her parents moved to a cabin in Idaho, 30 miles away. Keck preferred Washington and all four of its seasons. It was beautiful. "But aside from being in the news, there's not much else you can do in Spokane if you're in the entertainment profession," she shrugs. Los Angeles was her land of opportunity.

While her sister labored as an assistant editor on TV shows like *COPS* and *TOTALLY HIDDEN VIDEO*, Keck took jobs with a distribution company and a post-production house. "In Spokane, I produced, wrote, directed and edited for public access TV," she says. "In L.A., I got into editing much more than I ever thought I would, just from exposure to the equipment. I decided it was something I really wanted to get into."

About three and a half years ago, she launched a full-time career as an editor. Hired by Passport International Productions, Keck edited filmed chronicles on the lives of Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe; she also narrated the latter, which was released as *WE REMEMBER MARILYN*. It was at Passport, a company that routinely assembles documentaries, that Keck became acquainted with editor/writer Ted Newman.

An Oregon native, New-

som bad been around the block a few times. He came to Hollywood back in 1976. Finding work as a freelance writer, he submitted articles to *The Los Angeles Times*, *Daily News*, *National Lampoon* and *Cinefantastique*. Newsum eventually landed at Larry Flynt Publications where, as an editor, he worked with writers on the caliber of Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison and Rod Thorpe. Abetted by writing partner John Brancato—who'd later collaborate on scripts for *THE NET*, *THE GAME* and *FEMME FATALE*—Newsum sold screenplays to New World Pictures (*THE SUBMARINER*) and Cannon Films (*SPIDERMAN*). Newsum later federated—sans credit—with writer/actress Brinke Stevens (1:1) on 1994's *TEENAGE EXORCIST*: "New that film was screwed up by the casting of Eddie Dean—in the role of a 16-year-old female cheerleader." Newsum had realized there was a lesson in there somewhere, something about crass commercialism and art. But it was all too disgusting to ponder.

A picket team leader during the 1988 Writers Guild strike, Newsum later pursued employment unrelated to writing. He did a two-year stretch as a private investigator, and squashed-in a gig as director of *THE ALIEN WITHIN*, a no-budget sci-fi saga produced by Fred Olen Ray. Sampling documentary videos, Newsum made the lauded *ED WOOD: LOOK BACK IN ANGORA* for Rhino Home Video. He also negotiated the final union of Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing for his homage, *FLESH & BLOOD: THE HAMMER HERITAGE OF HORROR*.

Newsum was on duty at Passport International when Keck initially passed through the door; matter of fact, it was he who interviewed the youthful apprentice for the editor's job. Call it fate or destiny or whatever, but they shared something that neither one could originally fathom.

L.A. COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER

"Tests revealed that Linda Sobek's blood alcohol level was .13 percent, above the .08% level considered legally drunk while driving. She was sexually assaulted prior to her death."



Travis Keck, as Sobek, poses with the law, but the real-life cheerleader was sent with cops only when her corpse was discovered. (L) Keck as Gerald Brodin (as Sobek's murderer, Charles Hethcote) & director-to-puppet Ted Newsum.

It's quite an understatement, and not just a little cliché, to call Hollywood a cynical town. But perhaps one of the saddest measures of its cynicism is the perpetuation of stereotypes: the "model/actress" has turned into the town's proverbial doormat. Previously known as MAWs (Model/Actress/ Whatever), practitioners of this hybridized career have lately been bestowed with a new, telling contraction: *mattress*. Dream-making is a dirty business, but the industry lies behind a cloud of perfumed air. The scent of the Promise Land is allur-

ing and sweet.

Linda Elaine Sobek was born in Norwalk, California (July 9, 1968) to Bob and Elaine Sobek. She was raised in a working class neighborhood of Lakewood, and debuted as a model while attending Artesian High School, where she was a cheerleader and member of the school drill team. Sobek was awarded first place in a local beauty pageant. Her friends recall that she "then began taking modeling very seriously." After graduation, Sobek signed up at Cerritos College, a two-year school where she earned an associate arts de-

gree. By then, further studies were out of the question. She had found her vocational goal. Or so she thought.

The fledgling model was an attractive girl—not classically beautiful—but she knew how to make the most of what she had. At 5'4" she was too short to do high-fashion modeling, so hiking work would have to do. A boob job and a nose job wrapped-up the package.

Actually, Linda Sobek didn't know what she wanted. Modeling was just a job, a means to an end, but to what end, she didn't know. She didn't understand men, either. Friends would poke fun at her dates (one colleague described them as "stupid monkeys"). Sobek's suitors always left her hurting, their chastisement incrementally expanded from baby steps to total, deliberate abandonment. Sobek cruised through the world of Hollywood models, a miffen charged with insults, flattery, rejection and approba-



tion.

Sobek was a trusting person. Brian Ashley of *Saturday Posters* magazine, who may have hired the ingenue more frequently than anyone else, recalls Sobek picking her backyard pool as a location. The aspirant model habitually booked her own jobs; the upside, of course, was that she could pocket the cut an agent would have been entitled to.

Around 1988, Sobek signed with a Hollywood talent agent named Gordon Rael, who accumulated an entire stable of MAWs. Unfortunately, Rael couldn't find any movie or commercial

BLACK DAHLIA

DAVID LYNCH'S CHRONICLE OF A SLAIN STARLET.

The Dahlia haunts us still

On the morning of January 15, 1947, the nude body of a young woman named Elizabeth Short was discovered neatly sliced in two in a vacant lot in Los Angeles. The gruesome find became the start of one of the most baffling (and still unsolved) mysteries the Los Angeles Police Department ever encountered.

Short, a seductive-eyed, shapely girl with jet-black hair, was originally from Massachusetts. She worked in Southern California as a waitress, a would-be actress and, some say, a prostitute. At the time, there was a popular Alan Ladd movie, *THE BLUE DAHLIA*, in theatrical release. Because of the color of Short's hair, and the fact



John Gilmore documented the brief history of the Black Dahlia, a Hollywood ingenue who may have turned tricks. Her body was "neatly sliced in two"

that she usually dressed entirely in black, friends (or clients) of hers—who had seen the Ladd film—dubbed her *The Black Dahlia*.

Literally scores of books have been written about the Black Dahlia Murder. The story was even adapted into *WHO IS THE BLACK DAHLIA*, a lauded (1975) TV movie starring Luce Arnott.

John Gilmore is an actor-turned-author who has had personal and professional relationships with the likes of James Joplin, Steve McQueen and Hank Williams. Gilmore's reminiscences of the late stars were applied to his book, *Laid Bare: A Memoir of Wrecked Lives and the Hollywood Death Trip*. A close friend of James Dean's, Gilmore eulogized the legendary actor in *Live Fast—Die Young: Remembering the Short Life of James Dean*.

Soon, Zanja Press will be re-releasing Gilmore's *Severed: The True Story of the Black Dahlia Murder*. "David Lynch is going to be

doing a film version of the book," the author confided. Gilmore, a tall, silver-haired man who could be a clone for the late Aldous Huxley, is ecstatic that the director of *ERASEHEAD*, *THE ELEPHANT MAN* and *TWIN PEAKS* is translating his chronicle to film. "Lynch said that my book was the most satisfying and disturbing conclusion to the Black Dahlia case," Gilmore said. The movie will be produced by the Edward R. Pressman Film Corporation; Laurie McQuillan and Alessandro

Camon are writing the screenplay.

Unlike the TV movie, Lynch is tuning down the police involvement and concentrating on Short's personal life. The scene representing her demise is likely to provoke some contretemps with the MPAA (Lynch has already been there via *WILD AT HEART*).

A rival production, not based on Gilmore's book, is also being readied for filming: David Fincher, the visionary behind *SEVEN*, is scheduled to direct.

Mitch Persson

Sex & violence: Director David Lynch (*BLUE VELVET*) is adapting Gilmore's chronicle of *The Black Dahlia*.



work for his client. Claiming that Sobek just didn't fit the cookie cutter, Rael insisted her height was a liability.

Sobek had the look of approachability, though she often put on airs when men treated her respectfully, or when she felt preyed upon. One acquaintance recalls an incident at a club: after introducing himself, a fellow asked Sobek if she'd like to dance "With you?" she scoffed and then turned away.

Sobek later became a Raderette cheerleader. Suddenly, she had groupies, what with posing for calendars and posturing for TV cameras. But the money was pitiful and even Sobek realized that her celebrity would be short-lived. She still had to struggle to get by. By season's end, she was an ex-Raderette.

Raised a Catholic, Sobek became a born-again Christian and was baptized on her 27th birthday (July 8, 1995) in Redondo Beach. She regularly attended her new church's services.

During the same year (October, '95), Sobek became acquainted with Charles Rathbun at a Las Vegas *neo* show. He flipped her a business card, and she reciprocated with her home telephone and pager numbers. Rathbun mentioned a photo assignment he had coming up for a truck magazine, and she expressed some interest. He phoned her on the morning of November 16th. It seems the truck-related assignment had been dropped from his itinerary; instead, Rathbun revealed to Sobek that he had a product shoot scheduled later that day. The centerpiece was a brand new Lexus utility vehicle. He had originally planned to put Glenda Elam, his girlfriend, into the picture but the shoot had to be moved up because the manufacturer wanted the shots earlier than originally planned. Elam was unavailable for the impromptu schedule, and Rathbun needed a last-minute substitute.

Sobek was a little flus-



tered; that afternoon, she had a wardrobe fitting in San Pedro and an TV audition for a cameo role. Still, this was work—not another dog fight to compete for a bit as “Bimbo #3” on *MARRIED WITH CHILDREN*. So she agreed to pose for Rathbun. Her salary was \$300. Since time was of the essence, they agreed to meet in the parking lot of Denny’s restaurant in Torrance, next door to the Mobil station (Crenshaw Boulevard and 182nd Street). Cancelling a lunch date at the Cafe Med restaurant on Sunset Boulevard (West Hollywood), she left a new outgoing message on her answering machine which indicated she was heading for an assignment and would be inaccessible via telephone. She grabbed some outfits, her make-up, her portfolio and her day planner and set out from Hermosa Beach to Torrance. Her car, a white 1992 Nissan 240SX, was later discovered in that parking lot, but Sobek was never seen alive again.

Tuesday, November 21: the police recovered loose pages from Sobek’s day planner and some personal photographs from a trash can along the Angeles Crest Highway. They also found the loan agreement for the Lexus—Rathbun’s name was listed on the document. Inadvertently or not, Rathbun had mixed the certificate with evidence he had intended to dispose of. Hermosa Beach detectives questioned Rathbun the next day. The photographer denied that he knew anything about Sobek’s disappearance. Matter of fact, he vowed to come down to the police station later that afternoon. But Rathbun never showed up.

Instead, Rathbun decided he needed a plan. He got himself drunk, and then called a female sheriff’s deputy whom he knew.



Keck on Sobek: “There was something in Sobek’s eyes that looked like a challenge, a dare,” says Newson. “Trull & photographer Jan Deen captured it in these pictures.”

Rathbun admitted to the deputy, and his attorney, that he had killed Sobek and was bent on suicide. Unbeknownst to Rathbun, the sheriff’s deputies had already begun surveillance on his house on Canyon Drive in Hollywood, north of Franklin Avenue. They watched when a gunshot rang out and Rathbun’s friend, the deputy, ran from

the house screaming and bleeding.

Rathbun had fired his .45 automatic handgun into the floor to show he was serious. A piece of flying shrapnel had struck the deputy in her arm. Rathbun was taken in to custody and confessed, though he claimed the model’s death was an accident. He and Sobek had driven to a dry lake bed off of the An-

geles Crest Highway. Rathbun persuaded the starlet to drive “doughnuts” on the lake bed, but, recalled Rathbun, when she failed to do it properly, he offered to show her how. Sobek was standing nearby, observing, when Rathbun lost control of the Lexus and clipped her. In a panic, he loaded her body into the back seat, where she died. He then drove around for hours in a daze, finally deciding to bury her in a shallow grave and discarding her belongings. He agreed to take the police to the spot, if he could remember it.

It was a good story, but there was no way they were letting him go. He was booked early Thanksgiving morning on suspicion of murder.

Sobek was legally drunk and sexually assaulted before her death by asphyxiation, an autopsy report confirmed Monday, read the morning paper on November 27, 1996.

“The mode of death is ruled as homicide,” read a statement from the Los Angeles County medical examiner’s office. Tests revealed that Sobek’s blood-alcohol level was .13 percent, above the .08 percent level to be considered legally drunk while driving.

The autopsy found that Sobek was “sexually assaulted prior to her death,” the statement read. Sobek’s memorial service was held at the First Baptist Church in Long Beach on Friday, December 1, 1996.

In October 1996, as the case was about to go to trial, Newson and Keck talked about doing an adaptation of the tragedy—somehow, the case prompted no *Movie of the Week*. “I said to Ted, ‘We should do this story,’” recounts Keck. “I felt connect-

ed to it. I wanted to play Linda and co-produce it with him and edit it." The two decided to split the costs and the work down the middle.

According to Keck, Newsom was apprehensive about tackling the story, although he had to admit the parallels between Sobek and Keck struck him. Like Sobek, Keck was an attractive 5'4" blonde. Keck had been a high school cheerleader. Newsom finally caved-in, and the project developed as documentary with dramatic re-enactments. "Once he had started on it, he became very excited," relates Keck. "It was something different than he had done before."

Assembling a stack of clippings, Newsom phoned both the newspaper reporters who covered the case and police detectives involved in the investigation. He called Sobek's friends and the photogra-

TRUDI KECK, ACTRESS/EDITOR

44 [Filmmaking partner] Ted Newsom would see Linda as a pretty girl who knew she could 'get' a guy. I'd see it as she felt insecure, wanted to be pretty and didn't feel that way about herself."



Trudi Keck, embodying Linda Sobek says "Linda was a good person who seemed to be an even better person." L: Keck and filmmaking ally Ted Newsom



phers who had hired her. He talked to people who knew Rathbun. Newsom's script rendered Sobek into the protagonist as well as its Greek Chorus: the victim testifies to the camera, doing that which she could not do at Rathbun's trial. The more he thought about it, the more Newsom realized he was attracted to the gray areas of the story, both in terms of its occasional moral ambiguity and the necessity of fleshing-out plot elements which are known only to Rathbun and his female quarry. Once a private eye...

By the time of the trial, Rathbun's story had changed. He now claimed

that an intoxicated Sobek hit on him by posing seductively. Some nude "close-up photos"—each had been double-exposed—turned up under questionable circumstances. Rathbun insisted the naked appendages belonged to Sobek, voluntarily striking lewd poses. His prosecutors knew that their best shot at conviction was premised upon canonizing Sobek while vilifying Rathbun; they claimed the photos, apparently shot indoors, were not Sobek at all.

"Rathbun got three or four chances to tell his story," notes Newsom, "and he revised it each time. First, he accidentally hit her with

the car, showing her how to drive 'doughnuts.' Then when they found the body, they found that it hadn't been hit by a car, and he said, 'Well, yeah, I almost accidentally hit her with a car and then she got real mad, and then I sat on her and I guess I sat on her too hard and she stopped breathing.' Then when they found she had been sexually assaulted, he said, 'No, it was consensual.' Unfortunately, the police really slipped up. He had asked on tape—12 times, I think—for an attorney to be present and the police never acknowledged it. As a result, they almost lost him right

there. Had they thrown it out, then everything they would have gotten from that confession—the fruit of the poisonous tree, including the body—they would never have been able to introduce."

Through court records and his police sources, who spoke under condition of anonymity, Newsom developed a profile of Rathbun: "I spoke to the police out here, as well as back in Michigan and Ohio—the other places where they were looking for solutions to unsolved mysteries. He was an extremely canny criminal. He knew forensics. As most serial criminals do, he had friends who were police."

Sobek had never canceled her other appointments for the remainder of her final day on earth. Perhaps she had hoped to call on route. Newsom asks, "Would she, in fact, polish off two-thirds of a bottle of tequila—in the middle of the afternoon on a photo shoot—if she knew that, when she got back, she would have to drive out to a fitting?" Friends say Sobek was never much of a drinker, anyway.

Which raises another question: what's the point of getting someone loaded if the plan is to tie her down, sodomize and kill her? It could have been part of Rathbun's ritual. Or it could have been part of his advanced defense mechanism, i.e., an alibi of consensual, albeit rough sex. Bruises were found on the inside of Sobek's lips, so a bottle might have been jammed into her mouth.

As for the nude photographs, Newsom says they are genuine but represent "trophy shots" which were snapped after the rape. "You don't mount the moose's head on your wall before you shoot it," he says. It was easier, more expedient, for prosecutors to dismiss the photos; after all, they had never come up with a satisfactory time line for the day of the crime, and they had never located the cabin or whatever the hell it was out there in the woods where they suspected the crime was committed.

Newsom is certain that the cabin counts; for one thing, a dry lake bed is a pretty wide open space, leaving miles of room for witnesses. Rathbun was a professional, all along, he had a plan.

"One thing that always puzzled me was the shallow grave that he dug up in the mountains," Newsom recalls. "I found the place where he buried her, and it is up the most inaccessible goddamn road I've ever been on. But still, I thought if I could find it, couldn't someone else? Then I realized that the road had been closed the day before he killed her, and would be officially closed until the next May. There wouldn't be anybody through there for six months. Brilliant. But then he buried her with her hand sticking out of the grave. I thought, 'How dumb is this guy?' He was walking around with a sign that read, 'Arrest Me.' He practically did, over the weekend, he said to friends, 'You know that chick that vanished? I killed her and buried her; they'll never find her.' Everybody laughed. Then it finally dawned on me why he buried her like that: he wanted her body to be found—by the animals."

Rathbun was a premeditated killer, a classic misogynist. "There are enough women who can come forward and say that he raped them and threatened to kill them, so I don't think there's any argument," says Newsom. "He was a classic serial rapist, in that the normal side of his life appeared to be okay. He had a girlfriend, he had friends, he shot pictures of fast cars, he liked guns and all that stuff."

For Keck, a portrait began to emerge of Linda Sobek as well. A sad one: "She was a smart, pretty girl, she seemed to have a lot going for her. But she was unhappy about a lot of things. She tended to keep her unhappiness from even her closest friends. Her diary said she had thought of killing herself. She was ac-



Keck on Sobek: "Dare is a beautiful and accurate film," says Ted Newsom. "But I do think the sex, suspense and mystery will make our film memorable. SWU photographer Jan Dunn captured a scene between glamour & the gloom."

ing a therapist."

Keck is also aware she had bitten off quite a big chunk by casting herself in the lead. "I had done a few bit parts, some with my twin sister, and the biggest role I had before this project was on *UNSOLVED MYSTERIES*, where I played Kimberly Pandelios. She was also a blonde model, who would also book a lot of her own jobs. She went to meet a photographer for an outdoor shoot one day and was never seen alive again."

Pandelios was a 20-year-old model of Cuban descent from Northridge, California. One year after her 1992 disappearance, Pandelios' skeletal remains were discovered in the Angeles National Forest—less than ten miles from the site where Linda Sobek's body was later recovered.

Back in November 1995, Trudi Keck was going through a rough time. She was training on an editing system and looking for full-time work. On the 17th, she was on the way out her front door when she heard a report about Sobek's disappearance. Having shot the Kimberly Pandelios episode of *UNSOLVED MYSTERIES* a few months earlier, the first thought that ran through her mind was, "They should check up in the Angeles National Forest." The news reports multiplied over the coming days, and soon others were making comparisons between the two cases. The *UNSOLVED MYSTERIES* segment was repeated.

"One tidbit we picked up from someone involved in the Pandelios investigation was that the family received a call—on the day she vanished—from Paul, the photographer whom she supposedly met up in the mountains," Keck explains. "He said, 'She left her day planner with me, I'll have to get it to you.' Of course, they never got it. But they were able to trace the phone number he left, which was an answering service. The

TED NEWSOM, FILMMAKER

"One thing that puzzled me was the shallow grave that [Linda's assailant] dug up in the mountains. Then it finally dawned on me. He wanted her body to be found...by the animals."



Trudi Keck's portrayal as Sobek will debut in '96 at U.S. and foreign festivals. Michelle Fiset, also cast as a rape victim, delivers an intense performance.

answering service happened to be three or four blocks from Rathbun's home. It had been leased to a guy named Edgar. Jesus, no one is named Edgar. But that just happens to be Charlie Rathbun's middle name."

Rathbun had raped a woman back in Ohio on June 15, 1979 when he was 22. They both worked at a Kroger's supermarket in Worthington. She had found him standing outside the store, he had a flat tire and asked for a ride home. When she dropped him off, he invited her inside to view his photographs. Rathbun could be charming. She agreed.

When the woman tried to leave, he grabbed her from behind. "What are you going to do?" she trembled. "What do you think?" he snapped while unfastening her blouse. Forcing the woman to the floor, Rathbun tore off her clothes and told her that he would kill her if she made any noise. Then he raped her. Afterward, he informed her that he wanted to be punished for his crime. Describing himself as "very lonely," he claimed to have told people he was "sick," but no one believed him.

Rathbun was indicted six days later, but a judge threw the case out on February 12, 1980. His attorneys had moved to suppress his incriminating statements on the grounds that he had not been read his Miranda rights. That was it. A police fuck-up liberated him. The system was fallible. Rathbun never forgot.

Newsom and Keck started production of their film, *WHISPERS FROM A SHALLOW GRAVE: THE LINDA SOBEK STORY*, in May 1997 when the gods of free time, cheap locations and money smiled upon them. It was an eventful shoot. Newsom fondly recalls the day Luck raised its skirt for him as a guard at Pasadena's Rose Bowl simply waved the filmmakers through its gates, not at all cognizant the limited crew

would drive right up the field to shoot a cheerleading sequence, Sans permit.

The filmmakers shot on location all over town, utilizing everything from the exterior of Ruthbun's Hollywood home to Sebek's apartment to the makeshift burial site near Angeles National Forest. "We had the luxury of time," says Newsom dryly.

There's an old adage that goes something like, "When two people agree on everything, only one is doing the thinking." But in the case of *WHISPERS/SHALLOW GRAVE*, Keck and Newsom have disagreed and debated—sometimes rather heatedly—about the way the film should portray Sebek. "Both of us are very strong-minded," Keck says diplomatically. "I think we check each other. I think his standpoint, a male standpoint, placed a spin on the story that I couldn't believe he put on it. Ted would maybe see Linda as a pretty girl who knew that she could 'get' a guy, and I would see it as, maybe she felt insecure and wanted to be pretty but didn't feel that way about herself."

As the film passes into its post-production phase, Keck ponders her future: "I would like to do more acting. I don't want to stop editing, though, because it's fun and it's creative. On this show, in particular, I have creative control—along with Ted—over the final product. But I'm definitely interested in more acting. In all honesty, though, I wish I could have just focused on the acting in this and not had to worry about anything else."

It all made me think of something James Ellroy wrote about the Black Dahlia, the L.A. murder victim who has haunted this town for 50 years. "She reinvented herself with youthful panache and convinced herself that she was something original. She miscalculated. She wasn't smart and she wasn't self-aware. She cast herself in a cookie-cutter

continued on page 60



Keck on Sebek, "When she made the decision to be a bikini model," says Newsom, "Sebek changed more than aspects of her personality. She had breast work, and even nose surgery. Most of her buds didn't think it improved her."

ROB

"CAGED HEAT"! DIARY

By FREDERICK C. SZEIN

God help an actress who endeavors to keep a roof over her head in Hollywood. Back in '82, Rachel Ward (*THE THORN BIRDS*) told *FF*, "The emphasis on youth is not great for us actresses... I'd say by about 35, you're stretching it pretty thin." The longevity of sex symbols is even more short lived. Declared "golden girls" at age 30, they're replaced by 18-year-old cloned platinum bombshells.

Roberta Collins, who made her film debut in 1966, is a survivor. She's worked so often during the past 30+ years, "I've done some things I forgot I even did! I'm not kidding you [laughs]! I'm remembering as I talk, but don't ask for names and dates because it's gone."

A post-WW II baby boomer, Collins learned to dance by the time she was four years old. Upon turning sweet sixteen, Collins was employed as a fitting room model before she struck poses for photographers. Winning beauty competitions, she was variously christened Miss El Monte, National Orange Show Queen, Miss Lake Havasu, Miss Marine Recruiter, Brackett Air Show Queen, Recreational Vehicle Queen and National Queen of the Warner Bros./7 Arts Film Festival.

Sometime during her 18th year, Collins bailed-out of the modeling profession. "At that time, I didn't exactly decide to get into acting—acting decided to get into me!" she grins. "It wasn't something I had thought about as a child, like some people do. The way it came about was I was seen on a dance floor. The person liked me, was doing a movie and wanted to meet me. That was what got me going in the direction of acting. He liked the way I looked and how I presented myself on film. I went out on my first audition and was hired."

That film, *LORD LOVE A DUCK*, ('66), was a black comedy directed by



T. Roberta Collins, circa 1987, is dropping her B-movie persona ("With acting, I want to do something that makes a statement.") B. While filming *HARDBODIES 2* ('84), she was pursued by King (not pictured).



ERTA COLLINS

OF A DRIVE-IN DIVA: PARTYIN' & BUSTIN'-OUT WITH PAM GRIER.

George Axelrod who, four years earlier, co-wrote and co-produced THE MAN-CHURIAN CANDIDATE. Promptly hiring an agent, Collins signed with NBC at the end of the network's contract players period. Between films, Collins tallied appearances on cult TV (THE NIGHT STALKER, an Emmy-nominated episode of THE ROCKFORD FILES) and sitcom entertainment (I DREAM OF JEANNIE, LOVE-AMERICAN STYLE, etc.). She was engaged by Bob Hope to perform sketch comedy, with British actor/singer Anthony Newley, on one of the comedienne's NBC specials.

"When Hope and Newley cast me, they were looking for an English actress. They said, 'You don't have to be from England, it's fine if you can do a British accent.' I auditioned and got the largest role. In England, an ambulance is called a lorry. My first line with Bob Hope on the stage, in front of a live audience, was, 'Oh my gosh, should I call a lorry?' I had a mental block with that word. His line to me was 'What?' That's all he was supposed to say. I thought I said it wrong and said my line again. He said, 'What?' I said, 'Lorry—lorry—lorry?' I don't know! He goes, 'What-are-you-doing?' as he sat up in slow motion. The audience was in hysterics. They couldn't stop laughing because it was really funny and he wanted to kill me! (Laughs) I was really shocked, after that, that he hired me all over again to work with Tom Jones."

But Collins earned her celebrity—or notoriety, you call it—as a result of her visibility in low-budget B-flicks. EATEN ALIVE, THE AROUSERS, WONDER WOMEN and a string of Roger Corman quickies. It was the stuff that

"Sylvester Stallone fought to keep that towel around him, but I was supposed to drop mine. I complained to Roger Corman, but there was no moving him."



"I've done some things I forgot I even did," laughs Collins. And this understated horror movie, probably shot in the Philippines, is one of them. (Tidie Stern)

kept the drive-in trade solvent. It was also boot camp for directors earning their apprenticeship (Jonathan Demme, Joe Dante, James Cameron, Ron Howard, Martin Scorsese).

Collins united with Pam Grier (5/2) for a couple of women-in-prison epics, THE BIG DOLL HOUSE and WOMEN IN CAGES, both Corman productions were B-rated, shot in the Philippines and released in 1971. "To our great surprise, our TV spot for THE BIG DOLL HOUSE was turned down by a few stations, but then later accepted by the same stations to air late at night," recalls Corman. "So what we did, very quickly, was make a slightly softer spot to air earlier in the evening and had the harder one for late at night."

The film, directed by exploitation emperor Jack Hill (SWINGING

CHEERLEADERS, SWITCHBLADE SISTERS), struck Collins as being more than a little risqué. "When I originally saw the script before I accepted the job, I didn't want to do any nudity. I was very much against it. In fact, I turned down a film with Steve McQueen at Universal, which hardly showed anything. I was that uptight about it. I had been asked to do Playboy when I was 18, and turned that down. My first reaction when I read the script for BIG DOLL HOUSE was, 'I don't want to do that, and I don't want to say those words' (Laughs). Then I had people telling me, 'What are you talking about? Everybody's doing it.' They were mentioning names of different actors—whether those actors actually did it or not, I don't know."

"But being an actress, I wanted to work. I thought, 'Okay, I'll do it.' Then I had a real problem with the shower scene. I still was very, very upset and didn't want to do it, but once I got involved with the scene, I found that I was having fun. It was fun playing tough, taking over, being the bawdy woman. My favorite line was 'Get it up or I'll cut it off' (Laughs). I was waiting to give that line."

The locations were rife with unsanitary conditions and violent political upheaval. Collins, however, declines to validate the horror stories recounted by other actors in her cohort. "It was great!" she hoots. "It was a constant party. I was treated very, very well. The Philippines are either very rich or very poor. It's a Catholic country, and you couldn't go out alone at that time, so there were two guys who were the most eligible bachelors who I went out with, and they would take me dancing. I was very popular over there, I was in the papers. They called me the Blonde

Whirlwind? (Laughs) People couldn't have been nicer. I shot the rapids, which was better than Disneyland, and I had a dog named after me—it was going to be killed, and we saved its life. The woman who kept it gave it my nickname, which is Bobbi.

"A lot of people I worked with didn't like the food, nor a lot of other things about the place. For whatever reason, I was always having a great time! I'd dance all night and fall asleep on my way to work in the car, then I'd go on the set and perform! I have no complaints. It was a very interesting place."



"I originally didn't want to do THE BIG DOLL HOUSE. I had a real problem with the shower scene. But it was fun. My favorite line? 'Get it up or I'll cut it off.'"



T. Givens in *THE AROUSERS* (70); it drew raves from Leonard Maltin ("Pleats a wallflower"); 6. As Jean Harlow in the lost *TRASH KIDE TO HOLLYWOOD* (1975)

Illegal gambling, similar to American speakeasies of the 1920s, added to spice to the Manila nightlife. Dating proved equally capricious. Two jealous suitors, both competing for Collins' attention, experienced a classic case of bad timing: both showed up, in her hotel lobby, at the same time. One pulled a gun; the other guy made a beeline for Collins' room to call his bodyguards.

"And Ferdinand Marcos' bodyguard tried to get me. He kept saying, 'Don't you like Rolfs Royces? Don't you like this?—don't you like that?' He was trying to introduce me to Marcos. I said, 'Oh yeah, I like it all a lot. Get out of here!' He ended up being killed a couple years later. Guys who liked me would give me private dinner parties, and I invited a lot of the girls from the movie—anybody who wanted to have

some fun! I have nothing but fond memories of Manila. The one thing I found out about Philippines is when they like you, they really like you...and if they don't like you, you don't want to be their enemy. If they say that they're going to shoot you in three minutes, between the eyes, that's exactly what they mean. That's the way they were then. I don't know what they're like now."

Produced for a paltry \$125,000, *THE BIG DOLL HOUSE* grossed big bucks during its original and reissued releases. Her fledgling cult popularity prompted Collins to consider an "I Died For Roger Corman" epitaph.

Collins popped out B-film after B-film. One of them, *WONDER WOMEN* (production title: *WOMEN OF TRANSPLANT ISLAND*), returned

her to the Philippines. Hanging around with costar Nancy Kwan, Collins encountered another "dealing beans" match. "I was at a disco with a man I knew from Manila," Collins remembers. "An Australian approached the table and asked me to dance. My escort told him three times to leave, but he refused. So the man I was with moved to grab a bottle of champagne from the table to hit him over the head. I grabbed his arm and held it so he couldn't. The music stopped and everyone stared at us. I said to my friend, 'You could have killed him.' He answered, 'That's exactly what I wanted to do.'"

Though Collins lacks her conversation with humor and charm, we have a problem. A veteran of a couple dozen movies, she admits her behind-the-scenes recollection are defective partially because the film titles are often altered for reissued or television release. As an example, Tobe Hooper's *EATEN ALIVE* wasn't locked into a singular title. With a bit of nudging, Collins may recall the movie under any one of its optional titles—*LEGEND OF THE BAYOU*, *DEATH TRAP*, *STARLIGHT SLAUGHTER*, ad infinitum. *SWEET KILL* was reissued as *THE AROUSERS*, and *WONDER WOMEN* was released to television as *THE DEADLY* and *THE BEAUTIFUL*. Together we view to

muddle through.

By the mid-70s, filmmakers realized that Collins was often better than her material. Among her admirers was Jonathan Demme, a struggling young director who was trying to consist CAGED HEAT, a woman-in-prison saga, from another one of Corman's shouting budgets. Abetted by cast of drive-in divas (Cheryl Rainoux Smith 2.1, Barbara Steele), Demme managed to squeeze a strain of feminist angst from the usual surfeit of t&e. Seventeen years later, he capped an Oscar for his direction of *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*.

"With the hype that sold *CAGED HEAT*," says the elusive Cheryl R. Smith, "you'd might think it exploited everything under the sun. However, it takes a hard, serious look into the zoo-

like life of inmates who are likely to be locked-up somewhere in the Midwest. It's the best film of my career."

"CAGED HEAT (1974) was shot in L.A.," Collins remembers. "John (Demme) was a very big fan of mine and wanted me to do it. I don't remember any problems, except one day we were shooting in a jail. I forget why, but we needed a scene and I ended up writing it. Jonathan said, 'You're so talented; you can act, write, do anything.' He was very open to things like that. He also thought I was very funny. He had me telling silly jokes in that film. There was nothing really unusual in the making of CAGED HEAT. I can tell you some good stories—but they couldn't be printed!"

Her character is drugged and abused by the prison physician, but Collins had acclimated herself to these obligatory "drive-in" scenarios ("I had gotten into the flow of things... whatever"). But she had a problem, the following year, with DEATH RACE 2000, ironically the definitive cult classic in Collins' film legacy. The darkly comic film foretells that a fascist populace, desensitized to violence, will endorse hit-and-run driving as entertainment. Drivers admitted to the Transcontinental Road Race score points by plowing into pedestrians (toddlers under 12 years=70 points, senior citizens over 75 years=100 points). The cast, directed by Paul Bartel (EATING RAOUL), was a who's who of B-film pageantry: Mary Woronov (5:1) as "Calamity Jane," Sylvester Stallone as "Machine-Gun Joe Viterbo" (who's "loved by thousands, hated by millions"), David Carradine as "Frankenstein."

Cast as "Matilda the Hun," Collins had some meaty lines ("Whoever named your car The Bull was one half right."). But, off-camera, she lost her sense of humor when nudity came into the picture. "I was very upset even then," she gasps. "When we shot the scene where all of us were to be getting massages, Sylvester fought to keep that towel around him. And I did not want to sit up, have an argument with Mary Woronov that was in the script and have my towel drop! Roger [Car-



Collins was initially reluctant to do nudity, "But I wanted to work." While shooting Carnal films in the Philippines, she was pegged "The Barely Whitehead."

man] and I went back and forth on this. Maybe I wasn't strong enough to win the fight, I wasn't willing to walk away. There was some reason why Roger listened to Sylvester and let him keep his towel on. There was no moving him."

Carradine, infamous at the time for his temper, remained aloof: "I never got to know him. I remember walking in and he'd be sitting in the middle of the room meditating or whatever. With me, he wasn't real open. I remember him being very to himself, quiet, reserved, introverted, stoned. (Laughs) I don't know what he was doing!"

Much less introverted was the actor who, only one year later, would surf into the mainstream with ROCKY. Oh yeah, I couldn't wait to hear the "Sylvester Stallone story," a real howler that was supposed to have transpired during a lunch break.

But—"I wish I could tell the story," Collins giggles. "It's funny, but I wouldn't want it printed!" (She's right. It's funny but chaos would likely ensue. A less scrupulous journalist would have you rolling on the floor by now.) "I wish I could name-drop, but I have a problem with that. I might as well write a book if I'm going to put my throat on the line."

Brickly changing the subject, Collins recalls that she "wrote a scene and performed it for DEATH RACE 2000. I never got to see the rushes. They said it was so funny that it was the best scene in the movie. Everybody was fighting to keep it in, and Roger wouldn't use it because it sort of stuck out, I'm trying to remember; I have no idea what I did. I tried to get those outtakes, but they don't know where they put it."

Though her role is relatively small in the ensemble film, Collins made an impression on Tom Shales, acerbic critic for The Washington Post. "As Annie, (Carradine's) spying sidekick, Simone Griffith does not register strongly," wrote the reviewer, "but then who could compete with Roberts Collins' inimitable portrayal of 'Matilda the Hun'? She is a joy one hates to see go bloody." Upon reading the rave, Jon Davidson, then the p.r. director for Cor-

man's company who would later produce AIRPLANE, rang-up Collins: "He wanted to know who I knew to get such a good review! I knew nothing about it, but found out that hardly anyone can get a good review from this guy; he's a tough critic. He only mentioned David Carradine and Simone Griffith. It wasn't a favorable review. He never mentioned Stallone, who I thought was great in the film."

Bringing up WOMEN IN CAGES, but Collins instantly dismisses it ("It's a stupid movie. Forget it. Go see CAGED HEAT"). I rattle off a couple of films that she made for producer Matt Cimber, THE WITCH THAT CAME IN FROM THE SEA and ALIAS BIG CHERRY, the latter film bewilders me. I never heard of it, and with good reason: it's the only film Collins ever made that was never recalled. "It was funny!" she recalls,

"funny and sexy. I don't remember anything about the film except that I was funny and sexy."

Another film that almost never saw the light of a projector was a musical called **TRAIN RIDE TO HOLLYWOOD** (1975): Collins was cast as blonde goddess Jean Harlow. The film was pulled from release as a result of legal friction between the filmmakers and the distribution company, which was owned by actor Tom (BILLY JACK) Laughlin. Co-star Phyllis Davis, who describes Collins as "very sweet," recalls the film as "All a dream sequence. I played Scarlett O'Hara and had a

"Quentin [Tarantino] brought me out to Warner Bros. I gave him a personally autographed poster from CAGED HEAT. He goes, 'I'm such a fan! I think you're great.'"



It: The strip-in film verges ("It's a modest party in the Philippines.") I: As one of the **UNHOLY ROLLERS**; Corman produced it as a Claudia Jennings vehicle.

ball. I loved the director, Charlie Renda, who did almost all of the comedy blackouts on the **LOVE—AMERICAN STYLE**."

During the remainder of the '70s, Collins oscillated from John Cassavetes film (**MINNIE AND MOSKOWITZ**) to blaxploitation (**THREE THE HARD WAY**) and back to Roger Corman for **UNHOLY ROLLERS**, the latter film was quickly assembled to capitalize on **KANSAS CITY BOMBER** (1973), a Raquel Welch vehicle—released the same summer—about roller derby divas. Corman cast his resident B-tombshell, the late Claudia Jennings, as a stripteasin' rollerblader. And Martin Scorsese made a few bucks serving as supervising editor.

Collins did appear in a couple of A-pictures, **WON TON TON: THE DOG**

THAT SAVED HOLLYWOOD (1976) and **MATILDA** (1978). Both films proved magical, making audiences completely disappear. **MATILDA**, a comedy (?) about a boxing kangaroo, tinted producer Albert S. Ruddy's track record (**THE LONGEST YARD**, **THE GODFATHER**). "When Al Ruddy saw the rushes," smiles Collins, "he told me, 'You'll become a star off this film. Nobody will be able to touch you for less than \$350,000 to \$400,000 per picture.' Al loved that script, but the problem with the film was it didn't come off too well because they put a man in a kangaroo suit—and that seemed to bother the audience a lot. It just didn't work. That thing really bombed. It's hard to come off a film like that. It's important that the film does well to really have an impact for

the actors."

In addition to film, television offered the actress steady employment, with guest roles on series (**B. J. AND THE BEAR**) and movies-of-the-week (**TERROR ON THE BEACHES**). She also shot a pilot titled **MALIBU**. Had the show been developed into a weekly series, Collins would have played a health food nut. But the project was busted after the network premiered it—to lousy ratings—in the same time slot as the competitive **A-TEAM**'s debut episode.

Crossing into the '80s, Collins forged her link with the exploitation industry. She did a horror parody (**SATURDAY THE 14TH**) for Corman's company, a teen comedy, **SCHOOL SPIRIT**, helmed by Corman vet Allan Hollick (**CANDY STRIPE NURSES**), and was pitched as an action star by Emil Parkin, owner of the Beverly Hills Karate Studio who was co-writing and co-producing **VENDETTA**. Collins, however, declined and opted for a supportive, less athletic role in the movie.

Later in the decade, she was cast in **HARBODIES**, a coming-of-age no-brainer. Showing an aptitude for revealing more tan lines than plot, the film proved profitable and spawned a sequel. It was on the Grecian locations for **HARBODIES 2** that Collins had a near-romantic tryst with Egyptian royalty. She was sitting outside in an Athenian café. King Faud, seated at a nearby table and accompanied by his mother, was gazing at the B-beauty and falling in love. The King pursued Collins across Greece, begging for her hand in marriage: "I'd throw him out of my hotel room saying, 'Get out of here! I don't want to marry you! I don't care who you are!' (Laughs) I was in a lot of the newspapers, royalty is a big deal there."

Another smitten suitor tried to woo the actress with offers of a villa. Collins was fending off these wolves while trying to make a movie. When the cameras stopped rolling, the movie's female harbodies tried to hire Collins as a healer. Huh? It turns out that she's a practitioner of holistic medicine, which detractors had formerly branded as witchcraft. Early in

her life, she had been approached by spiritualists and advocates of the holistic arts. They insisted that Collins wielded "a definite aura of healing." Bereft of talismans or herbs, the actress has calibrated her own psychic abilities. Hollywood pals, psychic astrologers and a profusion of personal experience prompted Collins to hone a talent that, however eccentric to outsiders, has been witnessed many times over the years.

Strengthening her resolve was a chance meeting with Mother Theresa. Collins conversed with the revered nun, who concluded their union with a blessing and some autographed prayers: "I was so touched. Later, I told one of the sisters, who works at the Catholic school next door to me. She said, 'Roberts, if you've met Mother Theresa, you have a mission and you'd better find out what it is.'"

Friend and former movie star Glenn Ford (GILDA, THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE) actually staked his life on Collins' spiritual guidance; at death's door in 1994, the now 81-year-old actor called upon Collins to heal him of his illness. It was during this same period that Collins expressed a professional disillusionment with Hollywood. First, she lost an opportunity to host "a show like ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT." Collins says her patience subsequently slipped when she was denied a role in a Sharon Stone film because producers beefed she looked too much like the star. And Collins alleges that she stored out of another audition when leading man Jean-Claude Van Damme made a pass.

These days, Collins has put her career on the back burner; she prefers to focus on her healing proficiency. Nevertheless, Quentin Tarantino—a life-long admirer—was hoping for a tête-à-tête with Collins on the '95 season finale of ER, the episode "Motherhood" which he directed. But the actress was busy: "The bottom line is Glenn Ford was expected to be dead. People would say to me, 'Don't let Glenn die.' I would say, 'I'm doing my best.' So far, so good. Glenn and I have been on the cover of the *National Enquirer* together

and in movie magazines. One article was titled *The Girl He Keeps Hides, and Why*. Good question. That's a story in itself. It would fill an encyclopedia.

"When Quentin called me, I was at Glenn's house and had been a major influence in keeping this man alive. When I went over to the ER set, it was like I was being torn. I just was not ready to focus on acting at all. God is the most important thing to me. I am a Christian, but it makes no difference to me what a person's religion is as long as he's a member of the human race. When I was a little girl, I asked my mother what made a person religious. She said, 'Well, I believe what the Golden Rule says—Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you can do that, you will be one of the most religious people walking around.' With

my life experience, I'd have to agree with that."

Upon administering her spiritual therapy to Ford, Collins—besieged by phone calls—finally visited Tarantino. "It was funny," she recounts of the meeting. "I just didn't care about my career after losing the movie and that thing with Jean-Claude Van Damme. I'm not putting this on him, but it all happened around the same time."

"Jonathan Demme and Quentin Tarantino remind me of each other," she continues. "They have the same kind of positive, upbeat attitude, very excited, almost childlike. Quentin brought me out three times, and I gave him a personally autographed poster from CAGED HEAT. Before he called me—you could chalk it up to my psychic intuition or whatever—but I had the feeling that one of the purposes of this man's life was to rebirth careers, bring people back but in a different light. That's what he did with John Travolta. Then, right after he called me, I went into Warner Brothers and he said [breathlessly], 'I'm such a fan of yours! I think you're great! You're so wonderful!' I said, 'Well, I'm a fan of yours too, Quentin.' [Laughs] The whole thing was so hysterical. I couldn't believe it. Glenn Ford was calling me. Quentin was calling me, and all of the sudden I was sitting in the ER offices."

With renewed faith, Collins negotiated for a new agent and is rummaging through scripts that exorcise her B-babe incarnations: "I'd like to play a real woman who has many colors. She's not just this way at this time and that way at another. She is, above all, feminine. She's approachable, funny, serious, curious, dominant, submissive all at the same time."

"I want to do something that means something. I don't want to do something just to do it. I don't care about that. As far as acting, I want to do something that makes a statement. I would like to do something that really turns me on—because when I'm turned on, there's really no stopping me!" □



Collins, '96. She's worked with Jonathan Demme and Albert S. Fudgy. Fans include Quentin Tarantino: "Now I want to do something that means something."

SHANNON TWEED

EROTIC THRILLER EMPRESS

HER MOST CANDID INTERVIEW TO DATE: REFLECTIONS ON ACTING, A-MOVIE SEX, B-MOVIE SEX AND SEX AND VIOLENCE.

By Ari Bass

"I admire Shannon Tweed so much because she's a family woman and she acts like a lady..."

Julie Strain

On the set of *WHITE CARGO*, located at Los Angeles' Lacy Street Production Center, I'm introduced to Shannon Tweed. Casually dressed in sweats, she is poised and impossibly stunning. Glancing down to look me in the eye, Tweed sighs, "I hate interviews."

Yours truly continues, full speed ahead: "I called your manager a couple of weeks ago, but we weren't able to set anything up."

Tweed nods in acknowledgement. "Oh, you're the one."

Shannon Tweed is perhaps more famous as an icon than an actress. Not that she isn't a good actress. For better or worse, her screen persona is routinely linked to a specific movie genre: the erotic thriller. Lately, however, the actress has sought to expand her range, with action films (sample last year's *ASSAULT ON DEVIL'S IS-*




Tweed & Julie Strain in *VICTIM OF DESIRE*. "I'm called the B-Queen," says Strain. "But Shannon will always be my queen. It was a real dream to work with her."

LAND), comedic twists (appearing on sitcoms, most memorably *FRASIER*), and offbeat roles. Especially impressive is Tweed's performance in a film called *THE DARK DANCER*, a low-budget variant of *CRIMES OF PASSION*; she plays a psychology professor by day, an exotic dancer by night. Not coincidentally, the aforementioned film was produced by the company that backed *WHITE COMPANY*.

As we walk from the set to her dressing room, Tweed amuses herself by giving me a little bit of a good-natured hard time. "An interview, huh? I might want to do a book of my own," she deadpans. "Well," I dryly reply, "you still can." She smirks. "Yes, but I could save the real story for that and tell you all bes."

The ramshackle studio, a converted warehouse, is rather dreary. The atmosphere prompts Tweed to strip away the glamorous facade of film celebrity in one fell swoop. "You know, I keep thinking I see cockroaches," she says. "It's something about this place."



"I read [scripts] and think, 'That's pretty good,' & then it turns out to be nothing like what I read. I always feel betrayed at the end of a movie."

I go to the nicest places *

As a result of her Playmate of the Year christening, not to mention her height and stoic demeanor, Tweed's film roles have often ranged from black widow to imperiled femme to bitch. Professionally, she has deflected critical barbs by turning her imposing image into a shield. The real Shannon Tweed is simply as self-confident as any actor can be and just as grounded as any loving mother. Fans may be happy to learn that she smiles in real life—quite a lot, actually. It is the sincere smile of a bright, no-nonsense woman.

As she props up her feet on an orange naugahyde chair, and offers me a seat beside her on a worn but

Her career (R) "Tweed is the shit out of waiting tables." Coming clean (R) Tweed "makes sure there is not lots of unnecessary nudity in my work."



"I want to stress that the 'erotic thriller' genre is not all I'm capable of. It seems to be the most focused-on part in all of the interviews that I do."

comfortable couch, I study her face in a ray of sunlight. She's physically weathered the past 15 years, since her maiden *Playboy* pictorial, very well. Very well, indeed. Tweed slips her cell phone between us, leans back and feigns one last protest, whining, "What do you want from me?"

First, I wanted to tell you that I enjoyed THE DARK DANCER. It was something different for you.

I found it very confusing. It read much better to me than it turned out. I couldn't follow the movie and I knew the script, so I can't imagine what somebody new looking at it might feel. It's weird. I always feel betrayed at the end of a movie.

Always?

"ELECTRA [?] was hysterical," says Tweed. "It read like a weird comic book, supernatural stuff. I'm also lucky to be doing action movies [!]."



Usually. I read 'em, I think, "Oh, that's pretty good," and then it turns out to be nothing like what I read. But those are things that are beyond my control so I try not to fret too much about it.

I've seen some interviews with you...

You've seen them or heard them?

I've heard them, too—thanks for correcting me—on television, and please tell me if I'm correct, I have the impression that the one question that pisses you off more than anything is when someone asks, "Do you think what you do is really acting?"

It's so stupid. No, I'm making shoes, you ass-fuck [laughs] It's like walking into a shoe store and somebody says, "Can I help you?" "Yeah, I'd like to buy some bread." What do you think? It's a stupid question—and even if I thought I wasn't acting, I wouldn't say it. [laughs] Are you gonna ask me that, too?

No.

You just wanted to get me all riled up.

Exactly.

Okay.

Tell me about your character in *WHITE CANGO*, Alicia.

She's not a very likeable person—although in the end she sort of turns around. She's unsuccessful in her field: she's an agent, or started out to be an agent, and now owns the [modeling] agency. But I think she finds prostitution more lucrative than modeling, so she's pimping now. I don't have any love scenes—as don't get excited—but other people do. So, in essence, I'm selling the girls. At the end, I help David Bradley's character go after the bad guys. It's a happy ending. I'm sure my character ends up in the slammer for a while, but I think she's changed her ways. It got out of hand. She started out with prostitution, and it ended up with drugs and murder, and it's something she wasn't bargaining for.



Towed back in: Larry Funderburg in *CHEMISTRY 4*. "I'm either [my kids] saw me then violence. To some that sounds odd, but to me it sounds natural."

It's like my career: out of control [laughs].

Speaking of your career, I assume at some point you were savvy enough to realize that you could carve a niche for yourself, and you've done that very successfully. Was it as conscious as that?

No. As a matter of fact, I don't really think that anybody ever knows me. So I'll go somewhere, I'll walk with my kids and somebody will approach me—and I'll get very frightened, all of a sudden, because I can't imagine who they are or what they want. I'll go, "Oh, yeah, I do movies—I forgot. They see them on TV." You see, I do them and I'm finished with them. And I don't ever see them again. I don't watch them. So, to me, it's gone but, of course, it's still out there. I forget that anybody knows me.

From a business point of

view, though, did you make a decision to...

No. I never made a conscious decision. If I had, it probably wouldn't have gone so far in that direction, you know, because it kind of stuck up on me. *NIGHT EYES* got notorious. I did 2 and 3 together, and now everybody thinks I only do Andrew Stevens movies, for some fuckin' reason. I mean, he's only in three or four that I've done out of 27.

Why did you get into acting in the first place?

Umm, I didn't know what I wanted to do when I came to L.A. I was modeling and, umm, I thought maybe I would like to do the news or be a commentator on a magazine show. I ended up doing a magazine show for Playboy [TV] called *PLAYBOY ON THE SCENE*. It was like an *ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT* format, it was me and a guy talking

about contemporary issues but more along an adult theme. Somebody from Lamar saw me on that, and asked me to audition for *FALCON CREST* and I thought, "Hey, why not?" That's how I got into acting. But it was nerve-wracking, because I didn't really know what I was doing. The part was small enough that it could be ignored, which was good, because when you're learning in public it's not healthy to have a really up-front part. I did 21 episodes of that [1982/83]. Then I did a couple of years on *DAYS OF OUR LIVES* [1985/86] and a series on HBO called *1ST AND TEN* with O.J. Simpson [1989/91]. Then I had my own show on CBS called *FLY BY NIGHT* [91]. It beats the shit out of waiting tables.

Since you don't watch your movies, do you have a sense of when you got to a point where you could say, "Yeah, I can do this?"

I guess when I kept getting more work, because you're only going to get a few things before someone says, "Wait a second, you can't act." [laughs] And even if you think that actors who can't act make a lot of B-movies—that's true!—but they don't get on television as much as I do. So I'm pretty secure in my abilities, but I don't know when I became conscious that I was good or semi-good at it.

On what criteria do you pick the roles that you do now?

I try to make sure there's not a lot of nudity that's not necessary, that's the first thing I look for in the script—after the story's good. If it reads well, I'll go back and see how much nudity there is and take some out. And then, I'll see how flexible they are in dialogue and so on, then money, then location—do I have to leave my kids?—and then availability. It takes about an hour to decide. [laughs]

Do you now have a career plan?

You know, it doesn't matter what you plan; it's not

gonna work out. [Laughs] Of course, I want to continue acting. I've had many people ask me, because I'm a pretty technical actress, I'm very aware of what's going on on the set, what lenses are on, where the lights are, and left to right, etc. People ask if I'd direct any time. The only part of directing that appeals to me is directing the actors on the set. The pre-production and post-production holds no appeal at all. The pay sucks unless you're Spielberg and, no, I don't want to. If I had a project that I loved, I would push to get it made—and, in that way, produce my own thing. But to go out and beg for money, forget it. I do not have that drive.

What about this picture did you find appealing?

For a change, my character's not the victim, not the good wife wronged by some evil force. She has her life in her own hands. I like that; for a change, she's strong and a bit cold. She doesn't really have that much regard for other people and I don't know what that's like, especially when you have kids...you're always thinking about somebody else before you. It's kind of like throwing your personality away for a couple of hours a day, and playing with something that you'd never dream of being.

Was your role in SCORNED, sort of a "B" THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE, another example of that?

Oh, that was fun. She was such a bitch. [Laughs] It was great. You know what I would have loved? If we'd had some fake birds and I could have actually wrung their little necks. I love birds—I have three—so just the idea of slapping that bird cage on the way into the bathroom, with the poison, it was so mean.

I wish that movie had a little more money behind it.

Often the only difference between what they call "A" and "B" pictures is the money. Sometimes the stories are really good. But we can't



They & Chazelle: TUESDAY NIGHT EYES 3 "I did NIGHT EYES 2 & 3 together; now everybody thinks I only do Andrew Stevens movies for some tacky reason."

all be in A-films. Some of us have to keep the industry moving along. A-films are a very small part of the productions.

They're also, often, very derivative of the B-movies. What's BASIC INSTINCT if not a big budget erotic thriller?

But they're not called erotic thrillers when they have a big budget. I resent the fact that people get on me for doing nude scenes, when I never showed my crotch in a movie. But I guess if I had and I was paid a million, it would be okay. [Laughs] If you're making love to Michael Douglas and his hair, flashy sex then it's all right, but if you're making love to Andrew Stevens you're a B movie actress—so fuck off! [Laughs] It means, obviously, it's okay if you're rich but not okay if you're poor. So sex is dirty with a

poor man and okay with a rich one?

Speaking of erotic thrillers, is that genre played out?

I don't think that genre is ever played out. You can call it a "murder mystery," those never go out of style as long as you come up with interesting actors and stories. There's always a market for it. There's always Saturday night with nothing to do. I'm really lucky doing some action pictures, too. I'm gonna do a couple this year. I'll probably go to the other extreme and not even kiss anybody—just kick the shit out of them, I don't know. What gets me in the double standard of sex and violence. People ask me, "Are you ever going to do a movie that your kids can see?" First of all, I've done plenty of things that my kids can see on television and in

films, too. They're assuming that I would rather they see Schwarzenegger kill somebody than me make love to somebody, and I wouldn't, I would much rather they see sex than violence. To some people that sounds odd, but to me it sounds natural.

What was the last thing you shot before this?

I'm semi-regular on a USA series called PACIFIC BLUE. It's cops on bikes—ten speeds. I'm not a cop. They all come to eat and drink at my bar, and vent their problems. I also did this thing, it's hysterical—it had better be funny when I see it, 'cause I'll just flip if it's not. Get ready to hear me flip, right? It read like a weird comic book, it's got some supernatural stuff in it, and it's called ELECTRA.

You know that somebody stole my American Express card last week, and racked up about \$20,000 worth of goods? I just found out yesterday. I was totally devastated. I didn't know how these things worked, I thought I had to pay for it. Oh my God, I was livid. Oh, man. But, you know what, it goes to show you: I guess I'm not well known at all. [Laughs] Somebody went into Gianni Versace with my card, bought \$4,000 worth of stuff, and they didn't ID her. I can't believe that a six-foot blonde found my card. It must be that they just didn't know who I was. So there you go. That kicked me right down to size, didn't it? [Laughs]

If I see a six-foot blonde in a Versace outfit...

Say, "Where'd you get that?" And ask her if she shopped at Pottery Barn recently; she racked up a bill there, too. It's funny, you could see where they were testing the card. They got \$10 worth of gas first. You can always drive away at a gas station.

And I hate running out of gas on my way to Rodeo Drive. So of the movies you've done, are there any you're now sorry you accepted?

Well, I don't lose sleep



"I'd have done SHOWGIRLS. Abso-fuckin'-lutely. High profile with a good director, supposedly. She [Elizabeth Berkley] didn't know when to say no."

over any of them, but there's a couple that turned out pretty stinky I've blocked them out of my memory.

Do any of the roles you really wanted, but missed out on, come to mind?

I should have turned down a few more. A lot of those parts are already cast before you get there. I loved the part Michelle Pfeiffer played in *THE FABULOUS BAKER BOYS*. I loved *THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE* a lot. I loved the *BASIC INSTINCT* script when I read it, although I probably wouldn't have flashed my booty. That's where it helps to know camera angles, huh? Come on. I would never have taken off my panties with the camera dead in front of me.

"I resent the fact that people get on me for doing nude scenes," says Tweed (R). "No one's convinced me to back my bare for a movie career."



You don't really buy the story that Stone didn't know, do you?

Well, if she didn't know she's really stupid—let's just leave it at that. We don't think she's that stupid. I've met some sweet-talkin' directors, but there's no one that could convince me to flash my boobs for the moving camera. I'd have to be paid a lot more for that. That's extra. [laughs]

You mentioned *THE FABULOUS BAKER BOYS*. I didn't know you sang.

I have never sung professionally, but my mom always made me sing for relatives when I was little. You know, I don't think I could sing as Shannen; I would do a great job in a role, but I would never want a music career.

[Footnote: I later caught Tyrod singing to herself as she thumbed through her script. She has a lovely, sultry voice.]

Do you have a problem with public speaking?

I got more embarrassed in front of people whom I know than a million strangers.

Growing up, did you have a need to be noticed?

You mean a male adoration thing? Of course.

Not necessarily.

Of course. Most actresses come from broken homes [smiles]—don't you know that? That's why we're all needy, that's why we're doing this. That's why we're here.

Most have daddy complexes, too.

Exactly. That's why we're here seeking all this attention. We're so freaking confused. Nah, I'm really stable. My parents separated when I was eleven, but I had a good relationship with my father. I wrote letters and spoke to him through the years, until he died in the early '80s. I lived with my mother, she raised seven children.

I'm an only child. What's it like having a lot of siblings?

It's horrible. In retrospect, though, it was nice. It



Tyrod would prefer more chest: too up the 1960s THE BOMB. "I'd probably go to the other extreme & not even like anybody—just look the shit out of them."

was very exciting on the holidays, and you always had somebody to play with. On the other hand, every time you put something down, it would disappear...and you look in the fridge, and there's never anything to eat. I learned to eat very quickly because your brothers would reach over and say, "Are ya done yet?" and their hands would be right in your plate.

How many brothers did you have?

Three and three sisters. I was third oldest. I had a little more clout; I had four people I could hit on the head, [laughs] and I only had two that could hit me. I don't think it was great having a lot of brothers and sisters. I left home early, when I was about fifteen, because I just couldn't take it anymore. I didn't go far, but I was out of that same house.

Where was home?

I was born in Newfound-

land, I'm Canadian. I lived in Saskatchewan, Ottawa and then Toronto before I moved to Los Angeles. Yep, boy, I've been around. You know, we had to learn about the U.S. in school, I don't know what you guys learned. I guess, about the U.S.

No, we learned about Canada, too.

Oh, sure. You probably think we all speak French and live in eskimo huts...and have sled dogs.

No, no, no. We learned about Henry Hudson and all that.

Ohh, all those furs and stuff. My father was a mink rancher. Of course, that went bust in the late sixties when fake furs became popular. Now you'd probably get poked with tomatoes.

That's all honey, if you ask me.

Honey? [savors the word] Honey. They're not endangered, you heard them for

that. They didn't feel a darn thing, you just snap their necks. They didn't even know what hit 'em. They had a good life while they were alive: lots of food, they were with their families. They lived 25 dog years. Anyway, it's not cold enough to wear fur here, so I don't care. Of course, that doesn't stop some cows from wearing fur...I mean some women from wearing fur coats.

Tell me about some of your roles that you really loved.

I loved my series, *FLY BY NIGHT*. I love doing comedy. I also loved an HBO movie I did called *NO CONTEST* [1994]. Bad title, good movie. Good cast, too: Andrew Dice Clay, Robert Davi, Roddy Piper. No sex.

You make a point of that.

I do. I want to stress that the genre of erotic thrillers is not all I'm capable of. That seems to be the most focused-on part in all of the interviews I do. I don't resent that—it's made me a nice little sum—but I do other things.

That's the reason I started off this interview by...

Placing me off. [laughs] Just kidding.

What's your opinion of *SHOWGIRLS*?

What a stink-a-reenie, huh? There wasn't one actor in that whole thing. I don't get it. After the first week of dailies, don't you go, "Whoops, we're making a mistake. Let's get somebody else."

Who could they get to do that part?

Me, for fuck's sake. I'd have done that. Also-fuckin'-lutely. It was high profile, with a good director, supposedly I'd have done it because, you know what, an experienced actress wouldn't have let him get away with all that shit. She [Elizabeth Berkley] didn't know when to say no. I saw it and I said, "I can't believe she let him talk her into doing that scene." It's only because she's naive, and was so glibful for that part.

I think that within two years, Berkley will be work-



"The only difference between what they call A- and B-pictures is money. Example: they're not called 'erotic thrillers' when they have a big budget."

ing for Jim Wynorski.

You think so? Okay I'll bet you. [shakes the interviewer's hand] I bet she gets something good.

Elizabeth Berkley may—just may—get something good in between.

Oh! You didn't say that! We shook on it.

I said in two years.

Okay. I say she'll be doing more good stuff then.

I say you'll be buying me lunch two years from now. Speaking of Jim Wynorski, would you like to see my impression of him?

No, I may want to eat later.

Now that we know each other better, tell me, what's the strangest thing I'd find in your purse?

Probably red licorice. Always. I don't know why I eat a lot of it. Red licorice stuck to my cell phone.

T A gig as commentator, on a magazine show titled PLAYBOY ON THE SCENE, ignited Tweed's film career. B Messaged by Julia Stiles in VICTIM OF DESIRE. "They wanted me to flip Shannon over, so I'd rub her breasts, says Stiles. "Uhh..."



LYDIA CORNELL

A FORMER SITCOM SIREN, WHO WAS JUICY IN A "JAWS" RIP-OFF, MAKES A "QUANTUM LEAP" AS A SCREENWRITER.

By ZOE ALEXANDER

Earning adulation in the eighties as a blonde sexpot was a good job if you could get it. But, in today's fickle world, the shelf life of such a creature can be rather short. One day you're the flavor of the month, the next you can't even get arrested. So what's a gal to do?

If you are blonde bombshell Lydia Cornell, who played sumptuous "Sara" on the popular *TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT* sitcom, (1980-85), you trade in your big hair and bikini to take a walk on the cerebral side of life.

"After you're on a successful series and it ends, you get typecast," says Cornell. "I got offered a lot of B-movies and I could have really exploited myself, but, instead, I decided to pass on a lot of things because I wanted to do movies that were funny and entertaining, and have artistic value."

It's no secret that Hollywood's demand for funny, smart and subtle blondes is virtually nil (ask Goldie Hawn). So instead of regressing to the "dumb-



Cast as a sea monster's "babe bait," Cornell had no choice but to show more tan than acting range in 1982's *BLOOD TIDE* (produced by RKO TUD)

blonde" role that had nurtured her celebrity, Cornell rebelled. She challenged the machine that had made her an overnight success by deconstructing stereotype. It's likely the final time that she slipped into an abbreviated bikini was on an episode of *HUNTER* (1/24/87). Less than three years later, she did a vanishing act: Cornell decided to break out of limbo and be the master of her own destiny. A lofty ambition? Yes. Impossible? Well, it requires a rare mix of beauty, brains and balls. Luckily, Cornell possesses all three.

The ex-starlet wields a non-pretentious workliness and understated elegance that makes me wonder how—and why—she was cast as a dumb blonde in the first place. The youthful vacancy that lurks behind her blue eyes, in late-night reruns of the sitcom, is gone. It's been replaced with a calm peace and mature sensibility that, if you're lucky, comes with age. However, it would be a gross understatement to mistake her congenial demeanor for vulnerability, she's not the naive girl she used to be. This time around, Lydia Cornell in-



Cornell poses for a pin-up poster, circa '60. She abandoned the sex kitten persona ("I'd lose in the end unless I found a purpose other than posing a new *Flange Rover*"). In *The Stereotype* that proved *TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT*.

sists upon controlling her life.

"When I first started **TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT**, I was so green," she recounts. "I was afraid to stand up for myself, and I just sat back and let things happen. Now I want to write my own films and have more say in what is going on around me. If Billy Bob Thornton can make **SLING BLADE**, why shouldn't I be able to make my own films? This time, I feel like I have a game plan and I wonder why more women aren't doing this too? It's a boy's club out there, but if women would stick together—like the guys do—we could really do great things."

"I know that I have a lot of nerve fighting the business that made me [laugh], because I came up so quickly. I was only in L.A. a few weeks when I got **TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT**. It was a great opportunity, but I was not prepared for the egos in Hollywood. I thought being on a series was going to be more fun. The pressure was hard to handle, because they put a huge em-

phasis on me to maintain my weight and they wanted me to look a certain way that isn't really healthy or normal. It was a lot to deal with, especially because I was really green back then. I wasn't happy. I used to be in fear of the industry, I gave it too much power."

Cornell's roles anatomically lapsed into that "certain way" blonde and bosomy, she was required to show more tan than acting aptitude. Debuting as "Mary Beth" in a two-part episode of the unlamented **DUKES OF HAZARD** (1979), she eventually made the transition to feature-length film. Cast in **BLOOD TIDE** as James Earl Jones' squeeze, Cornell skinny dips into the jaws of a sea monster. She looked very Coppertone in the role; Jones looked very embarrassed. Naturally, Cornell's string bikini was the central focus of the film's trailer. The *Ingénue*, in fact, yielded to breathy stereotypes for nearly a decade.

"The problem with the business is





She strided as a starlet (left), but Cornell is determined to be a screenwriter. "Why shouldn't I make my own films? It's a boy's club, but if women stick together—the guys do—we could do great things."

that, as actors, we're all insecure," explains Cornell. "I got to the point where I refused to be stared at and had the anxiety of performing in front of a producer. No actor gets through an audition without some fear, and it shouldn't be that way. That's why I want to write my own films."

She had been pegged by industry insiders as "the new Suzanne Somers." And not unlike the "blonde bombshell" alumnae who piggybacked for the same (ABC) network—Somers (THREE'S COMPANY), Heather Thomas (THE FALL GUY) and Cheryl Ladd (CHARLIE'S ANGELS)—Cornell was prepped for a cheeseecake franchise. So why did she ditch the limelight? "It seems like the person on TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT existed in a different lifetime," shrugs the actress. "I was starting anew. I look at the industry through new eyes now. I took time off and traveled around the world and I



discovered that I've always been a writer at heart. And since I wasn't working on the show every day I had time to concentrate on it."

Hmmm...an actress who wants to be a writer. The hill of faïre would be a chapping/sex novel about Hollywood à la Jackie Collins, perhaps? Not exactly.

"The novel is a complex story—it's a psychological profile of the little known human side of Leon Trotsky

and his assassination," Cornell relates without batting an eyelash. "It's a reverse Mata Hari tale with an Oedipal twist. It's called *The Sylvesto Plan*. I'm in the process of whittling it down from my original 1000 page manuscript."

"I traveled all over Europe for research. I even went to Moscow to gather information from the KGB archives. It was quite an experience. I've also written a screenplay called *THE*

VENUS CONSPIRACY. It's a social satire similar to early, pre-Sean-Yi Woody Allen movies. It's a silly, yet profound film about the beauty industry. It's a reaction to my feelings that the entertainment industry places too much emphasis on being super thin and looking a certain way. A good friend of mine is on *MELROSE PLACE* and she's a size two, but is always worried that she might gain weight. It's unhealthy, but I know what it's like to have producers on you about your weight. It seems like we live in a world where you aren't cool unless you're a professional athlete or a supermodel. That's why everyone is so obsessed with their looks. It's insane—we're glorifying the wrong things."

Cornell is actively seeking solutions, and is centralizing on the mediums that impact adolescent females: "I'm tired of going to the movies and seeing all of these films that deal with the dark side of humanity and the minds of devious people. Actors are in a very unique position, as artists we can change the world. We have to be careful about the money factor and not let money and greed drive us."

Is she drawing from personal experience? Did Cornell, during the period she was marketed as bikini beachmodel, succumb to these same indulgences? The beautiful writer, who's forty-something, not-so-blissfully channels into her tenure as TV star: "I was so timid back then, I never thought that I'd have the strength to try and define myself outside of the business. I let people chip away at my self-esteem. I knew that I had to take a break in order to retain the childlike innocence and wonder that I had when I got to L.A. It's so easy to get caught up in concentrating on the money. I realized that I was going to lose in the end unless I found a purpose other than owning a new Range Rover. I fell into the trap that so many people in Hollywood fall into, everyone is so desperate to own more stuff."

ABC cancelled *TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT* in '83. The series, with a modified format, was subsequently produced for syndicated sale as *THE TED KNIGHT SHOW*. Cornell was hired for another two seasons. Gauging her past fan mail—postmarked from Estonia, Germany and Asia—the show wasn't locked into domestic visi-

LYDIA CORNELL

"After you're on a successful series, you get typecast. I got offered a lot of B-movies but I decided to pass. Now I want to write my own films."



The 41-year-old Cornell and her 3-year-old son Jack. Her projects include a novel, *The Swiss Plan* ("A reverse Make Me Hot tale with an Oedipal twist") and a *VENUS CONSPIRACY* script ("A social satire").

bility. Hence, the producers of the aforementioned horror film, *BLOOD TIDE*, rationalized that Cornell's celebrity was global enough to insure her casting (the film, originally produced as *RED TIDE*, was shot in Greece on a three-month schedule). Dyeing her hair brown, Cornell was later cast in the pilot of *QUANTUM LEAP*, a sci-fi series that drew marginal ratings and cult status. Her other guest appearances (*HOTEL SIMON & SIMON*, *FULL HOUSE*, *KNIGHT RIDER*, *FANTASY ISLAND*, *CHARLIE'S ANGELS*) proved less significant; nevertheless, her celebrity entitled Cornell to serve as hostess for *DICK CLARK'S NEW YEAR'S BOCKIN' EVE*. Cornell was cooking.

But, sure enough, she exorcised the glitz. Not your everyday, run-of-the-mill, garden-variety starlet, Cornell was a scholar. During her pre-Hollywood phase, she attended the University of Colorado. Studying theatre, and majoring in marketing, Cornell graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business—just in case the acting didn't pan out. As a result of her education, she's equally fluent in Spanish and Russian.

Furthermore, she vindicated her acting talent with a series of stage roles—*Enemy of the People*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Song of the Sparrow*, *Butterflies Are Free*, *Othello*, *Midsummer's Night Dream*, *As You Like It* and *Los Arboles Maecenas de Pie*, the latter performed in Spanish—which offered her a latitude of expression that was eclipsed, on TV, by stereotype.

Transforming from sexpot to scribe, Cornell has finally found contentment. But pushing a pen isn't enough. She also devotes much of her time to charity work. For several years, Cornell co-hosted the JAKS tennis awards to benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Joining a coterie that included Bill Cosby, Robert Loggia and Cliff Robertson, she travelled to Monte Carlo for the Royal Tennis Grand Prix, a competition supportive of the Princess Grace Foundation. She's on the ECO board which informs the public about environmental problems and possible answers. The venue also includes visits to terminally ill children and benefits for the Make-A-Wish and Starlight Foundations.

"It's important to give back because artists have the ability to change the world. The power of the media is amazing."

The former femme fatale's personal life includes Jack, her three-year-old son: "He's made me see the world through new eyes," gushes the former ingenue.

Lydia Cornell: proof positive there's renewed life after a sex kitten's sitcom sovereignty. "I now know that there are two ways to look at life. Either you can be negative all the time or you can see a gift in every moment. If you choose to be positive—magic happens." Will the next "blonde bombshell" survive with equal aplomb? Who's next? □



Jessica Teller poses for *PH* photos. Gracee Polman, *Surrender Cinema's* spinfire, Teller before played a memorable inmate for the company's *FEMALISH* franchise. She's cast as a "rock singer" in a full Moon sci-fi lampoon.

gold innie nurse's outfit.

■ My latest guilty pleasure? A: Pix Entertainment's 4th of July slasher flick, *UNCLE SAM*. Written by Larry Cohen, the film pokes sly fun at the notion of patriotism: a Gulf War hero (David Shark Franks) comes back from the dead on Independence Day to hack up flag burners and former Vietnam protesters. Actress Leslie Neale does a fine job as the villain's sister, a single mother who's struggling to raise her precocious, true-blue son (Christopher Opper). Anne Tremko plays the beautiful young wife who, unlike most women in this genre, manages to resist sexual temptation at every turn. Most refreshing of all is P.J. Soles, making a cameo appearance as a scheming mother who's seeking revenge for a fireworks accident that disfigured her son. Popular for her portrayal of "bad girls" in a couple of horror classics (e.g. *HALLOWEEN*), Soles returns to doing what she does best—playing comedic characters with a seductive edge: in *UNCLE SAM*, she essays her role as if the high school brat she portrayed in *GARRIE* had grown up and had a kid of her own.

Subtly directed by William Lustig, *UNCLE SAM* has just the right amount of humor, scores and social commentary.

■ Tame York, president of York Home Video, informed me that her company has acquired the video distribution rights to several films that were initially televised on the

Sci-Fi Channel. Among 'em is *LEGION*, starring Terry Farrell (*STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE 9*), Parker Stevenson, and Corey Feldman. The story takes a futuristic look at how military prisoners "volunteer" to defend the United States in high risk, intergalactic combat. A tactical team is sent to a distant planet with a mission to secure a military base; they soon find themselves being picked off by a cutthroat like thing. Other York titles: *SPOILER*, a sci-fi thriller starring Meg Foster (just seen playing Queen Anne in *THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK*).

■ Producer Mike Frankovich, Jr., son of former Columbia Pictures honcho, Michael J. Frankovich Sr., admits his frustration over trying to raise funding for *FEMME FORCE*.

The script is adapted from D.C. Comics' *Femme Force*, a 12-year-old illustrated series about a group of superheroes. Frankovich's difficulties stem from what he sees as the lenient monopoly laws in the U.S. "There is only one major comic book distributor left now in the United States," he says. "Diamond Distributors is under a contract to be purchased by DC Comics, which is a division of Time-Warner Entertainment [the largest media conglomerate on the planet]. We, the independent film producers, used to have the ability to go to private investors [to seek financing]. These investors used to be able to write off as a loss any films that did not make money [thereby lowering the risk factor]. Recently, though, the [major Hollywood] stu-

dies lobbied Washington to end tax incentives for independent financiers. The independent [producer], therefore, was eliminated from about 55% of the available funding when private investors said, 'If there's no tax incentive program, we're not investing money in movies. We'll invest in real estate or whatever.' Now there's only about 15% of private investors who are still interested in putting money into films." Faced with this dilemma, Frankovich says he's seeking international finance/distributors in Europe.

■ Surrender Cinema, whose direct-to-video output routinely hybridizes sex and thrashcore sci-fi plots—sample *FEMALISH*, *EXOTIC HOUSE OF WAX*, etc.—has announced the debut of their web site (www.surrendercinema.com). It's devoted to the Surrender's ensemble of sexy stars, including Jacqueline Lovell (\$3/\$7), Kara Styler (page 68) and Vanessa Taylor (\$3/\$7); visitors can access a profusion of photos, video clips and news updates on summer releases (e.g. *EXOTIC TIME MACHINE*, *VIRTUAL ENCOUNTERS II*, etc.). Ms. Taylor performed a cat-in-a *FEMALISH II*, which just wrapped up post-production: "The strip dance I did in that sequel reminded me of the old-fashioned burlesque shows I used to do. When I was a dancer, I did a whole show with feathers and costumes. I did everything from dancing as a nun to being Snow White!" □

P.J. Soles is *PRIVATE BENJAMIN*, adding another "bad girl" to a legacy that includes horror classics *HALLOWEEN* and *GARRIE*. Her latest: *UNCLE SAM*.



LETTERS

JADED

Just got the new job of FF (72) and thought I'd clear a few things up. First of all, I don't know any actress by the name of [Danalab], who claims she met me at a Chiller Theatre convention and claims I offered her a role in WIZARD OF BEVERLY HILLS. Not only did I not meet her at Chiller, I didn't offer her a role in a movie. I'm not even remotely involved in a film with the aforementioned tale.

Secondly, if I'm not crazy, Liz Brooks was in another movie prior to her death (not just a couple of films as writer Gagn Porter reportedly called JADED). It was an art film directed by Gja Kodar, photographed by Gary Graver and also featured Julian Kerner and Darin Wid-smuth.

Fred Glen Ray
Hollywood, CA

[Producer/director Ray's B-movie Buckknobs—HOLLYWOOD CHAINSAW FREAKS, ATTACK OF THE 60 FT CENTERFOLD, etc.—is accessible on-line. Top-in: <http://new.wapfilm.com>]

HEATHERS

Yes, Heather Graham is the only Heather in Hollywood of any consequence. Larry Greenberg's chat with the actress (71) was a bust. Without the "movie star" pretensions, Graham is deliciously candid and witty. Brilliantly herself. And gorgeous.

And in the same issue, Denise Gonsalves' conversation with Pat Tallman (BABYLON 5) was bone-chilling, what with the Hollywood's abandonment of actresses over 30. Tallman is not only sexy, she'll last a lot longer—and always looks a helluva lot more natural—than the average L.A. boob job. I applaud her silent on the Claudia Christian firing/resignation.

Maria Kristen is amazing! She may have been LOST IN SPACE, but her beauty is very much intact. Her vignettes about (almost being) cast as LOLITA, the original concept of Judy Robinson, etc. made me hungry for more. Congrats on the ONCE again, Kristen's 1974 "Adam & Eve" allegory. And thanks to Laura Schiff for

making ORGY OF THE DEAD, the screwy Ed Wood chestnut, our new (personal) party favor.

Lisa Thompson
East Lansing, Michigan

CHEWIE

Regarding your (72) article, THE GUNS OF EL CHUPACABRA/"Starlets Served as Fast Food." Den-Jackson and I are hoping to go the other way on this one, at least on a limited scale (Cannes prospects included Miramax and Sony). Thus, we're re-staged video deals though there's been loss of offers. Unfortunately, we're not happy with the soundtrack, and just got a few new groups to add some material. One is Holy Model Rounders. They did a song in EAST RIDER ("Do You Want to be a Rider?").

One correction: in one of the captions, you identified ROCK 'N' ROLL COPS as a Don Jackson film. But it's a Scott Shaw film. Don produced it for me.

Scott Shaw
DoctorShaw@aol.com

GLOWYORSKY!

The Sexmes interviewed for issue 72 prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that beauty and brains can coexist.

Don Scapprotola's interview with the SPECIES 2 cast was—let's face it—better than the movie. Enjoyed the conversation with Natasha Henstridge and her supporting sinches, but the wonderful Mary Holmgrenberger need only to lift an eyebrow to charge any batteries.

Loved the Jeri Ryan front cover, simplicity works for me—she's also effortlessly sexy and a great interview to boot.

Loved Bruce Hallenbeck's interview with Linda Harrison (PLANET OF THE APES). Thanks for her comeback. She's still hot, and her 40s retro is priceless.

Regarding New Zealand's Rebecca Hobbs: writer Alan Jones was grumpy to seeing her in a brief bikini while she relaxed at the Stages fest. So where's the paparazzi when you need 'em? Am I the only "square" who noticed that Hobbs is being rubbed the



Readers are wild about Kara Styler, one of Playboy's Women Achieving Daily, who has graduated into Surrender Cinema's sex-B teen

wrong way with greasy 3-D glasses from a 1961 film titled THE MASK (page 237). What's with the joke?

Kara Styler (page 8) is a fire alarm. All you could afford her is a bikini photo and a paragraph?? How about a profile on this no-B star? How about a web address?

One more beef: you listed a web site for Jungle Janet, the cliffhanger/safari sex kitten who winds-up in a pot or on a platter (shades of Little Annie Fanny). But the web address is non-functional. What goes?

Finally, how about another interview with Jamie Lee Curtis [11]? She's back in the genre with a sci-fi flick and a HALLOWEEN sequel.

A note to Laura Schiff when you compose the 60 Second Sci-Fi Femmes (78) list, don't forget Mira Sorvino (MEMMO).

Jim Randall
Omaha, Nebraska

[Reaction to Ms. Styler is unprecedented. Her angular photo has drawn a huge volume of mail. Duane Polcova has photographed the bombshell, who has qualified as next issue's centerfold story. In the meantime, check-out Ms. Styler on Surrender Cinema's web site [see this issue's Fatale Attractions] & top-in the bombshell's personalized web (right).

Jungle Janet's new web address has been abridged to <http://www.PeteHogg.com>

Jamie Lee Curtis is returning to FF via an exclusive interview taped on the set of VIRUS.]

FAN CLUBS

Send self-addressed and stamped envelopes, if you wish a reply.

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